

## The Ark Part I

### The Characters:

**Ron and Linda Green** - (white) Ron is a disabled (heart attack) former manager from a propane company; Linda is a homemaker who worked in a legal office before they got married. Ron has been married 4 times, Linda twice. Ron has 3 children (in the novel) from previous marriages, Scott, Jennifer and Paula. Linda has 3 children from her first marriage, John, Brenda and Kevin. They are California natives. Neither Ron nor Linda have any special hobbies.

**Gary and Sharon Olsen** - (white) Gary is a disabled (diabetes, diabetic neuropathy, dysthymic, major depression disorder, hypertensive with COPD) former tax auditor; Sharon is a homemaker who worked in payroll from the time they moved to California until 2002. Gary has 2 boys from his first marriage, Damon and Derek. Sharon has a Daughter from her first marriage, Lorrie. They have a daughter together, Amy. Gary is a California native raised in Iowa and Sharon is an Iowa native. Gary's hobbies are gun collecting and Ham Radio. Sharon's hobby is quilting.

**Clarence and Lucy Rawlings** - (black) Clarence was a carpenter until recently. He is currently not working due to surgery; Lucy was and is a homemaker. They have no children at home. They moved to California 30 years ago from Tennessee. Clarence's sister is Fred's mother. Neither have any hobbies.

**Fred and Jan Wilson** - (black) Fred is a paramedic with LA County Fire Department. His wife Jan works as a secretary for an insurance company in the underwriting department. They have no children. Fred and Jan are California natives. Neither have any hobbies.

**Chris and Patti Peoples** - (white) Chris is an audio technician for an LA Studio; Patti is a housewife. It is the first marriage for both. They have two children, Matt and Daniel. Daniel is severely handicapped (Non-Downs mental retardation). Chris and Patti are California natives. Chris is heavily involved in stock car racing and builds his own cars. Patti has no hobby.

All of the above characters live in Acton, CA.

**Damon Olsen** - (white) Gary's son. Works as a clerk in a Casey's General Store. Divorced. 3 children, Britney, Aaron and Erik who live with their mother. Damon lives in Nevada, IA.

**Derek and Mary Olsen** - (white) Derek is Gary's son. He is a plumber and in the Iowa National Guard. This is his second marriage; Mary is presently a homemaker with a background as a semi-driver. This is her first marriage. Derek has a son from his first marriage, Derek Jr. (DJ) who lives with his maternal grandparents. Derek and Mary have 2 children, Elizabeth and Joshua. They live in Huxley, IA.

## Chapter One – In the Beginning

“Funny,” he thought, “I thought that they would be harder to convince.” Ron shook his head and headed for the kitchen for another cup of coffee. It had been just luck that he had stumbled on the Frugal Squirrel Forum and found the thread about possibly starting a survivalist community in Colorado. He was immediately interested, it was time to get the heck out of Kalifornia. Time was when a man could own any kind of rifle he wanted; now, since the shootings in Stockton the General Assembly had nearly banned everything except BB guns.

Ron reflected on his guests’ reaction to his suggestion that they pool their funds and buy land in southern Colorado to form a safe community. Gary had been a bit vocal, he recalled....

“I can’t move into a community like that,” Gary exclaimed, “there is no way that I could pull my own weight! Some of you younger guys,” he continued, “are strong and healthy and can get around really good; I’m lucky I can walk.”

“Gary, you’re just feeling sorry for yourself,” Fred asserted, “not one of us is a kid anymore.” He went on, “The point is that we can do this if we all work together. You were raised on a farm in Iowa, you know something about agriculture, don’t you?”

“Less than you might think,” Gary retorted, “but enough, I suppose, to get by.”

“There you go,” Chris chimed in, “Clarence knows construction, Ron knows about everything there is to know about firearms, Fred is an EMT, and I can rebuild any vehicle on the road.” Turning to Ron, he asked, “What have you done so far to make this happen, Chief?”

“Well,” Ron said, “Kathy works for Coldwell Banker and I had her look into available farmland in southern Colorado. She saw the land that fellow mentioned on the forum and found a full section advertised for \$350,000. She contacted the Realtor in Pueblo and he told her there was a working well and a rundown farmstead on the property. She said that she thought we could probably buy the section for about \$320,000.”

“Well hells, bells,” Chris shouted, slamming his fist on the table, “we have nearly \$1,000,000 in equity in our homes, after commissions. This is going to be easy!”

“Not so fast, Chris,” they chorused.

“Yeah, Chris,” Ron exclaimed, “don’t get the cart before the horse! First, there are the wives to convince; then, if they agree, there’s the matter buying the property in Colorado and selling all of our homes. And, that’s just the easy part. Where are we going to live while we are building homes? Are we going to build the homes ourselves or hire some-

one to do it for us? What do we do for income in Colorado; are there jobs available for those of us that work for a living? There must be a thousand questions that I haven't even thought of; does anyone else see this as easy?"

"Ron, talk about getting the cart before the horse," Fred piped up, "you are almost as bad as Chris. Look, guys, we need to take this one step at a time. First, we have to get the wives onboard. Second, we need to make an offer on the property. Third, assuming that our offer is accepted, we need to list our homes. But, before all of that, we need to discuss this idea some more and decide if we are all onboard!"

"Where do we start?" Ron sheepishly asked.

"How about a set of goals, first," Clarence suggested.

"Shouldn't we vote on the idea first? Chris whined.

"No," Clarence responded, "first the goals; and then, if we are in agreement with the goals, we can vote on the idea. Has anyone ever heard of 'Intentional Communities'?" he asked, looking around.

"Tell us about them," Ron suggested.

Clarence drew a scrap of paper from his pocket. "I found a website that has a directory of intentional communities. The address is *ic dot org* and from what I read, the gist of it is that several families combine together to form their own community. These communities are as different as they are alike. Generally, they have some sort of agreement like the CC&R's we all had to sign to buy into our housing tracts. Some mandate that each member of the community have or acquire specified articles before they are permitted to join."

There was a murmur of approval from around the table.

"So, if I understand you right, Clarence, our goals would be based upon our agreement?" Fred asked.

"Other way around, Fred. Our Agreement would be based on our goals," Clarence smiled.

"Then, that's why you made the big deal about the goals," Gary said.

"Exactly, as my daughter used to say," returned Clarence. "When we have our goals we will have the basis for an Agreement; and, when we have an Agreement roughed out, we will be ready to vote on the idea."

"Hey, I've got a question," Chris all but shouted, "Ron, do you know any more about that land in Colorado?"

“It is a full section, 640 acres,” Ron stated, “located on the eastern slope of the Rockies south of Colorado Springs. Kathy said it is about 85% tillable and the remainder is foothills, which are covered mostly by aspen. The well, which is located at the rear of the property near the foothills, is good and the water rights are included in the purchase. The tillable acreage has lain fallow for two years and is overgrown. On the north and south are active farms or ranches. There is a gravel road running the length of the eastern property line. Anything else?”

“Sounds good to me,” Gary offered, “I think that we should consider some goals. And then, if we agree on them, we can put it to a vote. Sure hope Sharon goes along with this....”

“Now, are we talking about overall goals or goals with respect to this place in Colorado,” Chris asked. “And, what are we going to call this community if we decide to do it?”

“May I suggest that we call it *The Ark*? Gary said.

“Where did you come up with a name like that?” Fred asked.

“Well, back in my college days I decided to write a novel. The plot was about a large group of government selected people who were housed in the shelter, I called it *The Ark*, and the problems they experienced and after World War III. I....”

“Hey, I’d like to read that,” Chris interrupted, “can I?”

“No,” Gary responded, “got pissed at my girlfriend at the time and tore it up. Anyway, as I was saying, I had some pretty strange ideas about surviving at the time I started to write the novel. So, may I suggest that our first goal be to establish a self-contained community that can provide for 100% of our needs in the event of a SHTF scenario?”

“100%? The others responded in concert.

“There is no way we can provide 100% of our own needs at any time,” Fred exclaimed.

“Why not?” Gary asked, looking directly at Fred.

“Well for one thing, we need gas!” Fred retorted, “Just how the hell are you going to run your car without gas?”

“Ever heard of biodiesel?” Gary asked.

“Biodiesel is diesel fuel made by converting organic oils to a diesel substitute,” Chris offered, “from what I’ve heard, it is only moderately difficult to produce and can be produced from anything from soybean oil to leftover deep fryer fat. I read up on it at a place called Journey to Forever on the Internet. The really great thing about the stuff is that it

costs about half the price of diesel.”

“Well, I don’t know about 100%,” Ron stated, “I can think of a few things we can’t make, but, I’d go with a goal of 90% self-sufficiency during normal times, provided we had sufficient reserves of the 10% we can’t produce to tide us over during a SHTF situation. What do the rest of you think?”

After a prolonged discussion, they had all agreed with the goal Ron suggested and had added a second goal of maintaining a minimum one year’s supply of the ‘non-producible’ items in communal storage. They also agreed that everyone would be obligated to drive only diesel-powered vehicles.

“Now,” Ron asked, “What about guns?”

“What do you suggest?” Fred asked.

“For openers, I think that we should wait until we get to Colorado before we buy any guns,” Ron suggested.

“Why’s that?” Clarence asked.

“For one thing, we are really limited on what we can purchase here in the Great Republic of Kalifornia,” Ron said, “both in terms of weapons of choice and accessories.”

“Maybe so,” said Gary, “but I don’t feel right about not having at least a basic arsenal!”

“Ok, what would you suggest?” asked Ron.

“A .308 semi-auto main battle rifle, a .223 semi-auto carbine, a combo 12-gauge shotgun, a .22 caliber rifle and a handgun, preferably in .38 caliber or greater,” Gary replied.

“We would probably be limited to a Springfield Armory M1A for a MBR and probably a Ruger Mini-14 carbine if we buy them now,” Ron patiently explained to the group, “does anyone have a problem with that?”

“Ron, what would you suggest we buy after we get to Colorado?” Fred asked.

“The first thing I would do is take the M1A to a gunsmith and have the muzzle brake replaced with a stock flashhider. The second thing I would do is to buy a Colt AR-15HB to replace the Mini-14. Then, money permitting, I would buy a couple of SKS’s for each family and a dozen or more for the community,” Ron stated.

“Why replace the Mini-14?” Fred asked.

“The Colt is simply much more accurate than the Mini-14,” Ron responded.

“Ok, and why all the SKS’s?” Fred asked.

“For one thing, they’re inexpensive,” said Ron, “plus ammo is dirt cheap and they are a damn reliable firearm! Any other questions?”

After a brief discussion, they all agreed that they should each acquire the weapons, which Gary had suggested, immediately. Ron pointed out that he had a friend who ran a gun shop and was willing to put firearms on layaway if they didn’t have all of the cash at the moment. Ron suggested that anyone who would have difficulty operating a semi-auto pistol, like Gary, buy a .357 revolver.

Over the course of the evening, they had agreed on an initial set of goals. They then voted, unanimously, to pursue the plan. Each would discuss it with his wife and they would meet again, in 2 days, to continue their discussions.

## Chapter Two – The Wives

*Two nights later...*

“Well Ron, what did Linda say? Asked Gary.

“She liked the idea,” said Ron. “As a matter of fact, she thought that it would get us closer to the girls and my brother. It has the added benefit of getting us further from our pain-in-the-butt, Kevin. What did Sharon think?”

“Sharon is worried about getting too far from Lorrie,” Gary responded, “but I believe I can convince her on the basis that Lorrie is highly functional and Sharon’s sister lives nearby.”

“Patti liked the idea, too,” Chris added.

“Well, Fred, what did Jan say?” asked Ron.

“Best I can offer is a maybe,” Fred reluctantly replied.

“Why is that?” Gary asked.

“Her initial response was, *We don’t know anyone in Colorado!*” Fred responded. “I explained that Ron and Linda, Gary and Sharon, Chris and Patti and Clarence and Lucy would all be there; so, there would be people she knew, in Colorado.”

“And...?” Ron asked.

“Then she said that it snowed in Colorado and she didn’t like snow,” Fred chuckled. “I was able to counter every objection she had. In the end, she said, *I’ll see*, and refused to discuss the matter further. How did you make out with Lucy, Clarence?”

“Pretty good, I hope,” smiled Clarence, “she liked the idea of getting away from the gangs and didn’t seem to be overly upset about each of us having an arsenal. However, she pointed out that the first home she remembered living in during the late 1940’s didn’t have electricity or indoor plumbing and she never wanted to do that again. She said she would reserve judgment until I could promise that we would have electricity and plumbing.”

“I’d say that makes it 4 yes and 1 maybe,” Ron summarized.

“How do you figure?” asked Gary, “I make it 3 yes and 2 maybe.”

“Jan is the maybe; but the community will produce its own electricity, water and have a communal septic system, so Lucy is a yes,” Ron responded.

“Ron, it seems to me that you have been making decisions for the group,” Chris popped off, “that doesn’t seem very democratic to me!”

“Chris, of course it’s not democratic, I’m a Republican.” Ron responded laughing so hard at his own joke that he had tears in his eyes. “But seriously, it just makes sense to me that we maintain our standard of living to the extent possible. I am going to recommend to the group that we have communal water, sewage and electricity.”

“There is already a well on the farm,” he went on, “and I had Kathy check with the realtor in Pueblo about the well’s output. It seems that the well has a 6” casing and I suspect that will be the only well we need. As far as electricity goes, I am going to recommend that we buy two surplus wind driven electrical generators from those folks up in Tehachapi. The guy that ran my previous Internet service has a used gel cell that he will part with very reasonably.”

“How will that work?” asked Gary.

“First, you have to understand,” Ron said, and then paused to get everyone’s attention, “the gel cell he has for sale is 4 foot square and 7 foot tall. When I toured his shop a couple of years ago, I asked how long the thing would keep his equipment up. He told me that it could keep the whole system up for 4 hours; and, let me tell you; he had a lot of equipment. Hell, I’ll bet that sucker weighs 2 or 3 tons.”

“But, how” Chris chimed in, “would you keep a battery that large charged?”

“The gel cell was connected to a huge uninterruptible supply,” Ron asserted, “and, the power supply is also for sale. The equipment is old but well maintained. I just presumed that we could connect the power supply to the grid. Since the UPS is nothing more than a transfer switch, we can connect the output of the UPS to the grid. Then, if the wind stops blowing, we would be running solely from the UPS.”

“Makes sense to me, I guess,” said Clarence, “but what about the septic system?”

Ron smiled. “We can use a closed system and install an oversized septic tank. Since we won’t have storm drains, we won’t have to worry about rainwater in our septic system. One of the stories I read at Frugal Squirrel’s website, I think it was the *Lights Out* story, talked about using a windmill to pump their well water. My uncle Harry had a windmill and it supplied his entire farm.”

“Of course,” he continued, “we should put a large water tank on one of the hills and feed it from the pump. That would give us our water pressure. Then, we can run 3 lines down the center of each road, one for water, one for sewage and the third for electricity. Will that be enough to satisfy Lucy Clarence?”

“I expect it will, Ron,” Clarence answered, “You were right, Lucy will be a big yes!”



“Now,” Ron continued, “we need to figure out how to convert that maybe of Jan’s to a yes. Do you all want me to make an offer through Kathy on the Colorado property?”

After a bit of discussion, the five friends agreed that they should make an offer, subject to financing, on the property. Gary brought up the next subject.

“I think that we should discuss what will be ‘production’ and what will be ‘non-production’ supplies.”

“Fine by me,” Ron said smiling, “do you have any ideas in as much you brought the subject up?”

“It just seems to me that we will need a large community garden,” said Gary, “to produce our vegetables. We can also plant some fruit trees, which should bear fruit in about five years. There are just some things we can’t grow.”

“What, for instance?” Fred asked.

“Paper products for one,” Gary replied, “I don’t know about you, but I need Charmin! I doubt we can produce all of the spices we need and that goes for things like coffee and tea and sugar and flour and shortening and...”

“Wait a minute,” Chris interrupted, as he usually did, “there must be an easier way!”

Clarence said, “Now look here, guys, why don’t we all sit down with our wives and make a list of every single thing we buy from stores including food, clothing, et cetera. The next time we meet, we can combine the lists and figure out what the ‘non-production’ and ‘production’ items are. What do you think?”

All the heads around the table nodded in unison.

“Is there any other old business?” Ron asked. “If not, I would like to revisit the Jan question. Fred, what do you think it would take to change that maybe to a yes?”

“You know,” Fred, replied, “what I really think she is upset about is not having a job. She just hates to look for work.”

“What would she need a job for?” asked Gary, “we’ve already decided that the community would be 90% self-sustaining.”

“Yeah, I know,” grimaced Fred, “but she wants to work outside of the home at least part time so she has money to spend on clothes and what not.”

“May I offer a suggestion?” asked Clarence, “why don’t we make her a part-time employee of our Homeowners Association? We can pay her in script redeemable for things from the communal storage and can convert a portion of the script into cash if she

wants to shop in town.”

There were murmurs of assent from around the table.

“Think she will go for it Fred?” Ron asked.

“Don’t know, but I’ll ask,” replied Fred with a shrug.

“I have another question,” said Chris, “does anyone have any idea how we are going to build our homes?”

“One of those communities I checked out at the Intentional Community website used the slip form building method to construct their homes,” Clarence answered, “They even had pictures. Let me tell you, those slip form homes are rugged. I don’t know where we will get the rock, but I’ll bet that we could rough out those homes pretty quickly.”

“I thought you were a carpenter, not a mason,” Chris exclaimed, “So now you’re a stonemason, too?”

“Not really, Chris,” Clarence said shaking his head, “but, I can build the slip forms; and from what I saw on the web, that’s the hardest part aside from lifting the stones and setting them inside the slip forms. We can use premixed concrete,” he continued “and a PTO driven cement mixer. You know, of course that we will need a tractor, regardless.”

“What for?” Chris snorted, shaking his head, “this is getting complicated.”

“Chris, we are planning on buying 640 acres of ground which is 85% tillable,” stated Ron. “That is over 500 acres to plow, disk, rake, plant, possibly cultivate and hopefully harvest. I’m not sure one tractor will even be enough.”

“What do you mean by ‘possibly’ cultivate,” ask Fred.

“When I was in high school, way back when,” Gary responded, looking up, “the big topic of discussion among all of the FFA boys in class was ‘trash farming.’ ‘Trash farming’ (no-till) is where you don’t cultivate crops and avoid turning the soil as much as possible to avoid erosion. The last I heard, the idea wasn’t widely accepted, but some farmers do it. Since we would no doubt be rotating our crops, about the only time we would have to plow would be to turn an alfalfa field so we could plant soybeans or corn.”

“Well ok, farmer boy, just what crops were ‘we’ planning on planting?” grumbled Chris.

“Chris, we are going to have livestock; cattle, hogs, chickens, a few sheep, maybe some goats and perhaps even horses. We will have to produce corn, soybeans and alfalfa at a bare minimum. We will probably plant oats and perhaps wheat as well.

"I was raised on a farm when all of the farming was organic, even though the farmers didn't realize it. That meant that we rotated our crops between nitrogen fixing and nitrogen consuming crops. Supplemental fertilizer came in the form of manure from the livestock and chopped corn and bean stalks. We can use the PTO on one of the tractors to drive a hammer mill and produce our own organic animal feed."

"Well, city boy, it's all in a day's work for a 1950's style farmer," laughed Gary.

"What corn we don't convert into livestock feed can be used to produce ethanol, moonshine to you city boys. Biodiesel is normally produced using pure methanol, but there is an alternative process using ethanol. We can thus minimize the amount of outside supplies we need to produce biodiesel. Plus we can legally produce a couple of hundred gallons of booze a year for the heathens among us," Gary smirked.

"The soybeans produce oil and I don't believe it would be impossibly difficult to setup a processor to extract the oil. The byproduct of the oil production is high protein animal feed. We can probably raise enough cattle and hogs to market some giving the community a source of income. The soybean oil is vegetable oil that we can use for cooking and the production of biodiesel," Gary concluded.

"Well gents," Ron chimed in, "I think that brings us to a closing point for tonight. Let me summarize what we have accomplished. First, we have decided to make an offer on the Colorado land; secondly, we have discussed and agreed upon a plan to provide our own utilities, courtesy of the Good Lord; thirdly, we have general agreement on building construction; fourthly, we have an idea of the livestock we will be raising; fifthly, we have a pretty good idea about what crops we might want to plant; and finally, we have some idea of things the community can do to generate funds for our 'non-production items.' All in all, not a bad evenings work. Does anyone have any other comments before we adjourn?"

Everyone looked beat and the shaking heads suggested that everyone had had enough for the evening.

"That being the case," Ron intoned, "I'll contact Kathy tomorrow to get her to make an offer on the property. Does everyone think we want to start at \$320,000?"

The nodding heads suggested agreement with the proposal.

"Fred, be sure to talk to Jan about the part-time job, ok?" Ron said looking at Fred.  
"Meetings adjourned. Anyone care for a cold one or another cup of coffee?"

### Chapter Three – Jan

Nearly an hour later, the troops made their goodbyes and headed home.

“Whew,” thought Ron, “this is slowly starting to come together.” He joined Linda in the den, noting her rapt attention to the TV.

“How did it go?” Linda asked, as he settled into his recliner.

“Not bad, not half bad,” he murmured. “We decided to make an offer of \$320,000 for the ground in Colorado. I’ll call Kathy in the morning and get her on it.”

“Watch yourself!” she retorted, “That broad is trouble!”

“Yes,” he mused, nodding as he replied, “She sure had Gary going for a while, didn’t she? What are you watching?”

“I put on *Red Dawn*, we hadn’t watched it in a while,” she answered. “Ron, do you think this is going to work out?”

“That’s hard to say, honey,” he responded, “so far the only holdout is Jan. The best that Fred could get from her was a maybe. We voted to offer her a part-time job as I suppose you would call it the secretary of the Homeowners Association. I guess we’ll just have to wait and see.”

“Why don’t I get together with Sharon, Lucy and Patti, Ron?” Linda purred, “We will invite Jan over for coffee and find out what her reservations really are! Besides, Sharon just finished the quilt she has been working on and I want to see it.”

“You know, honey, I had a thought,” she continued, “We have over 600 VCR tapes and a couple of hundred DVD’s. Gary and Sharon have almost 500 tapes and a couple of hundred CD’s. Plus, Sharon must have every Harlequin romance written in the last ten years; we could start a community library!”

“Hey, that’s a good idea,” he replied. “Gary saved all of his books, too. He complained that when he left Sharon he had thirteen garbage bags of paperbacks to haul around. Plus, he has every book he used in college, law school and the Drug Rehab School he and I attended. I’ll bet we can set up one hell of a library! Well, babe, I’m going to bed, I have a long day ahead of me tomorrow.”

“Um-hum,” she murmured, once again engrossed in the TV movie, “I’ll be up in a little bit.”

When Fred arrived home, Jan was just finishing loading the dishwasher. The slamming and banging sounds emanating from the kitchen warned him that she was upset about something. “Honey, I’m home,” he called to her, “is there anything I can do to help?”

When she didn't respond, Fred journeyed into the kitchen to see what was going on. Jan had finished loading the dishwasher and was leaning against the counter staring at the window.

"Honey, I'm home," he repeated, "didn't you hear me?"

"I heard you!" she replied, the tone in her voice ominous. She just stood there silently sobbing. Finally, she turned to Fred and asked, the venom in her tone obvious, "Did you Wonder Boys figure out what you're going to do?"

"Jan, we are going to make an offer on the property," he replied matter-of-factly. "But, I have some good news; the Wonder Boys, as you called them, suggested that we should hire you as the part-time secretary for the Homeowners Association. You'd be paid in script, which you could spend at the community storage and half of your script could be converted to cash so that you could shop in town. Isn't that great?"

"Those fatheads have another think coming if they think for one minute that I'm going to work for a bunch of Monopoly money!" she retorted. "You just don't get it!"

"Jan, why don't you explain it to me," Fred offered gently.

"Look Fred, all of you guys are just a bunch of adolescents wanting to go on an extended camping trip." Jan said, nearly shouting. "The only time I've been in the country was when we went to Pearblossom to pick Bing cherries. I'm a city girl, born and bred; I don't think much of this crackpot idea that all of you Wonder Boys have about moving to the boonies. I mean there won't be any stores, malls, theaters, or anything! What makes you think for one damn minute that I'd want to move 25 miles from nowhere on a permanent campout?"

"Jan, Pueblo isn't a small town," he said, "and, this will give us more time together. I...."

Just then, the phone rang. They just stood there, staring at each other. Finally, after the third ring, Fred said, "I'll get it."

"Hello, this is Fred."

"Oh hi Fred, this is Linda," can I speak to Jan?"

"It's for you," Fred said, a look of defeat in his eyes, "Linda wants to talk to you."

"What does she want?" Jan quizzed Fred.

"She didn't say, she just asked for you"

"Hi Linda," Jan said taking the phone, "what's new?"

“Jan, I just got off the phone with Sharon,” Linda responded smoothly, “she just finished her quilt project and we were thinking about getting together tomorrow night to check it out and for coffee; can you come, please?”

“Gee, I don’t know,” Jan replied, “I’m a working girl you know and I have a lot of housework to do in the evenings; I am not as lucky as the rest of you with a lot of free time on your hands.”

“It sounds to me like you need a night out with just us girls,” Linda concluded, “Can you be here at 7 pm?”

“I suppose,” Jan reluctantly agreed, a smile starting to form on her face, “Ok, I’ll be there at seven.” She hung up the phone and turned to Fred. “You’re going to have to do the vacuuming tomorrow night; I’m going out,” she said with a smirk.

“Where are you going?” Fred asked.

“Never mind, Fred,” she said cattily, “We girls have things to talk about, too!”

*The next evening, the girls were gathered in Ron and Linda’s kitchen...*

“Sharon, I just love the quilt,” Lucy bubbled, “how ever did you manage to put it together?”

“I got the pattern from a website called FreeQuilting dot com.” Sharon replied. “I picked up the fabric on sale at Hancock’s and my friend Cecille helped me cut it out and piece it together. That Viking Quilter’s model machine that Gary bought for me made the whole thing relatively easy.”

“How ever did you get him to buy you an expensive machine like that?” they chorused, “those things cost a couple of thousand dollars!”

Sharon chuckled, “I’m guessing that he still has a guilty conscience about his little fling with Kathy. Plus, I didn’t come right out and ask him for the machine; I just drug him to Hancock’s and showed it to him. Of course, complaining about how Amy ruined my Viking 600 didn’t hurt. She’s the apple of his eye, you know!”

They all nodded in agreement with her explanation.

“Men are so easy,” Patti laughed, raising her eyebrows. “When I want something, a hot bath and a dab of perfume work wonders.”

“Speaking of our lesser half’s,” Linda intoned, “What do you gals think of this scheme of theirs?”

"I hate it," Jan said, nearly shouting, "Fred wants to drag me to the middle of nowhere and live like a hermit!"

"Try looking at it a different way, Jan," Linda suggested, "no more long checkout lines at Albertson's after you've braved the pickets; and, Ron mentioned that they were going to offer you a job working for the Homeowners Association."

"A job, yes," Jan flared, "but they intend to pay me with Monopoly money, so it's not a real job now is it?"

"Well I think it is a very important job," Lucy stated. "It will take a pretty smart person to run the Homeowners Association. Personally, I'd be flattered if they had offered the job to me. Besides, Jan, Clarence told me that you could convert that so called Monopoly money to real money to spend in town."

"Only half," Jan replied, somewhat subdued, "I just don't like the idea of not getting paid in real money. Besides, living 25 miles from nowhere will be so lonely."

"Girl, what are we, chopped liver?" Lucy asked with a single raised eyebrow, "You are going to be so busy that you won't have time to get lonely!"

"Ron and I discussed having a library with books, videos, CD's and DVD's," Linda, added. "Between Sharon and I, we can fill a small library."

"Really?" Jan ventured, with the beginnings of a smile, "what kind of books?"

"Sharon reads the romances," Linda explained, "and Gary is into action-adventure-mystery types of books. Between them, they have over a ton of paperbacks. Is that about right, Sharon?"

"I suppose," Sharon, replied, "All I know is that we have a whole garage wall covered with boxes of books. Each box contains about one and one-half cubic feet of books and weighs about 50 pounds. There must be about 80 boxes there!"

"How many books in each box?" Linda asked.

"Well, each box is 3 layers deep and has 30-40 books per layer," Sharon said, "So, that's what, about 100 plus books per box?"

"Times 80 boxes!" Lucy exclaimed, "Why that's 8,000 books!"

Jan sat staring off into space, perhaps reflecting. She wasn't certain that she wanted to voice her real objections to this project. Finally, she took a deep breath and decided to risk it.

"I have a couple of other concerns," Jan offered, barely above a whisper.

“Well, let’s have them,” Lucy replied, “There’s no time like the present to get all this ‘stuff’ out.”

“First,” Jan began, “the idea of a closed community brings to mind Jim Jones and the wacko in Waco. I’m just not into the idea of a commune! The next thing you know, someone would be suggesting that we all kill ourselves to protest this or that or the other thing!”

“And, second?” Patti asked, clearly upset by Jan’s comment.

“Well...I’m not much of a church goer, and, well I’m just afraid that a closed community might have some strange ideas on religion,” Jan responded, “I’m not against religion, but I would prefer to practice MY religion as I see fit.”

“Anything else?” Pattie demanded, her ire beginning to show.

“Not really,” Jan meekly responded.

“Get this straight, Jan,” Patti retorted, “this is about surviving, not dying. And, as far as religion goes, I’m Presbyterian, Gary is Methodist, Sharon is Lutheran, Ron and Linda are Baptist, Fred, You, so far as I know, Clarence and Lucy are Catholic. Chris thinks God has a 400 cubic inch engine and 4 racing slicks and he hasn’t set foot in a church since the day we were married. I can’t see any kind of religious problem with that mix. Anything else?”

“I mean,” Jan began, “it’s not like I’m against church or anything; it just worries me.”

“You know, we could have a non-denominational Sunday service at the Common House and those that felt the need could attend,” Lucy offered. “Besides, we all believe in the same God, right; well, except maybe for Chris,” she added, snickering.

Jan was all smiles now that her ‘Catholic’ friend had seemingly dismissed religion as any sort of issue. “This could turn out to be all right,” she thought to herself.



## Chapter Four – Corporate Matters

After the women left, Linda checked on Ron. He was sound asleep in his recliner in the den. She gave him a peck on the top of his head, being careful not to wake him. As she tiptoed out of the den, her thoughts turned to....

“How did it go?” Ron asked.

“I’m sorry Ron, I didn’t mean to wake you!” replied Linda. “Ok I guess; I think Jan may be coming around to our thinking.”

“Did she say...” he started to speak.

“No, not really, call it woman’s intuition,” Linda stated, “she left smiling and humming to herself.”

“What was her problem?” Ron asked.

“Oh, nothing really, just some girl stuff you wouldn’t understand,” Linda said smiling. “Did you talk to Kathy today?”

“Yes I did,” Ron replied flatly.

“Oh, and how did that come out?” Linda asked coyly.

“She wanted to get together for lunch so I could sign the offer papers.”

“Ron, you didn’t!”

“No, Linda, I told her I had a pretty full day and I stopped by the office around 3:00 pm and signed the offer. She wanted to go out for a drink, but I passed,” Ron said frowning.

“Well, I should think so!” Linda roared, “I can’t wait to get all you men away from that, well, never mind.”

“Linda, I’m going to bed, I’m tired of talking about Kathy. You know cotton picking well that I’ve never had any interest in her. And, you cotton picking well know that I did everything in my power to talk Gary out of that fling that they had.” He got up from the recliner, muttering at a barely audible level, “Dang women never give you any peace.”

“What was that, dear?” Linda perked up.

“Never mind, I was just talking to myself!”

*The next evening at Ron and Linda’s...*

“I heard back from Kathy today,” said Ron.

“How is that two-timer?” asked Gary, frowning.

“You really have to get over it, Gary,” Ron said, “She was her usual vixen self. Anyway, the seller counter offered at \$340,000.”

“Hey Ron, what should we do?” asked Clarence.

“I think \$320,000 was a fair offer for that land!” Chris offered.

“I think that we should counter offer \$330,000,” said Ron, “the mere fact that he came down \$10,000 suggests, to me at least, that he is anxious to sell. How about it boys, want me to make the counter offer?”

A few minutes later all, except Chris, had agreed that they should make the second offer of \$330,000. Clarence gave Chris a hard stare.

“What are you staring at?” Chris demanded, giving Clarence a hard look.

“Oh nothing, Chris, I just never realized before what a cheapskate you were,” Clarence said snickering. “So the guy wants an extra thirty odd dollars an acre, so what? When I lived in Panorama City 20 years ago, I asked my landlord why he didn’t buy the vacant lot next to our apartment complex and put in another building. He said that the price was just too high; the owner wanted \$50 per square foot for the lot

“We’re only offering the guy an extra .0004 cents a square foot for his land. Even if he won’t accept our counter offer and we go ahead and buy the section for \$340,000, the land will only be costing us a little over a penny a square foot. One point two cents per square foot, Chris; a whole one point two cents per square foot,” said Clarence with a laugh.

“I am not cheap,” Chris insisted.

“Right,” said Clarence, panning the table with an exaggerated wink, “just what is that coin you have on your keychain, again?”

Responding without thinking, Chris said, “Oh, you mean the first nickel I ever made?”

Groans were heard from all around the table.

“Alright, I’m in,” said Chris, “and I’m not cheap, just a little frugal.”

“I need to revisit a couple of things we talked about the night before last,” Ron stated, “I was discussing the electrical business with a friend, David, and he said that I might be off-base with my plans. He told me that we should allow about 10KW of energy per

house. Although we will only be starting with 5 homes and a Community House, maybe 75kw of demand, I think we should be forward thinking here. I would suggest that we initially install 4 new 50kw wind turbines and the related equipment.

“We could still use the UPS and gel cell to maintain uninterrupted power, but we should also have a 200kw or larger backup generator to cover us when the wind isn’t blowing. So far, I’ve only looked at the Generac units. There’s another company, Onan makes similar units. Generac has a new modular system that produces anywhere from 200kw to 1,000kw per module. As the community grows, we can add additional modules. Another thing that David pointed out was the possibility of our using methane for heat/cooking gas/water heating,” Ron continued.

“Where are we going to get methane?” Fred asked.

“Of course,” Gary said, nearly shouting, “We are going to be raising hogs. A lot of farmers in Iowa have methane pits on their farms to convert the hog manure to methane. I hadn’t thought about that since the story I read a few years ago in the Des Moines Register about the two farmers getting killed in their methane pit.”

“Whoa, stop right there,” said Fred, “Killed? What happened?”

“If I recall, the son went into the pit without his Scott Air-Pak,” Gary said, “guess he thought he could hold his breath long enough to clear an auger or something. Anyway, he passed out and the dad ran in to drag him out, also without his Scott Air-Pak. Twice dumb, I’d guess you’d have to say.”

“Getting back to the main subject,” Ron intoned, “we can produce enough methane for all of our initial needs. If we need more, all we have to do is increase the size of our herd of hogs. David said that we just use gas stoves, hot water heaters and furnaces. All it requires is a simple jet change.”

“You make it sound awfully simple, Ron,” Clarence said, “Surely it isn’t all that easy.”

“Yes and no, Clarence,” Ron replied. “David suggested that we get all the electrical stuff from one supplier, something about wholesale discounts and drop shipments. Said we could save a bunch of money that way. We’d probably really be well off if we could get the hot water heaters, stoves and furnaces from the same supplier. I’ll look into it a bit more and get back to you guys on this, ok?”

“By the way Fred, not to change the subject, but, how did you make out with Jan?” Ron asked.

“I’m not sure,” Fred, replied, “All I know is that she was humming when she came home last night. She was definitely over her mad. Sort of got affectionate, if you know what I mean.”

“Fred, old buddy,” Ron smiled, “I think the vote is now unanimous.”

“I just want you guys to know that I am NOT a cheapskate!” Chris injected. “There is nothing wrong about being frugal. Anyway, I guess I’d be willing to agree to \$340,000 for the farm if that’s what it takes.”

“Have you been sitting there all this time worrying about us calling you a CHEAP-SKATE?” Gary asked. “Did you hear a single word about the electrical and gas setups?”

“Yeah, I heard,” Chris dejectedly responded, “but it’s all Greek to me.”

“It’s really simple, Chris,” Ron stated, “I’ll summarize for you when you’re paying attention.”

“Alright, alright,” Chris huffed, “you have my undivided attention.”

“First, electricity,” said Ron, “we will start with four 50kw wind turbines backed up by the UPS/gel cell rig I mentioned and a modular backup generator. Second, we can produce our own methane and use it as a substitute for natural gas for the hot water heaters, the stoves and the furnaces. Are you with me?”

“I guess,” Chris muttered.

“We can supplement the hot water heater with solar water heating,” Ron said.

“Hey, I know about that,” Clarence interrupted.

“Share, big guy,” was all that Ron said.

“Back when I lived in Panorama City, I had a neighbor who installed solar systems,” Clarence offered. “I’m sure the technology is better now, but they had a system that ran water through some sort of black pipe setup mounted on the roof. As long as the sun was shining you had plenty of hot water. The hot water was fed to the gas hot water heater and there was a temperature-controlled valve that switched the line from the roof between direct house feed and feeding the hot water heater. Anyway, it was something like that.”

“It sounds to me that we are getting somewhere now,” Ron suggested, “Now I have to bring up the delicate subject of financing this project. Four nights ago when we first discussed this we concluded that we had a combined net equity in our homes of about one million dollars. I suggest that we form a Colorado corporation for our Homeowners Association. We can establish the stock value at \$100 par value per share and issue each member the number of shares that equals their contribution. If you put in \$200,000, you get 2,000 shares, it is as simple as that.”

“The corporation,” Ron continued, “will use the money to acquire the land and equip-

ment we need. When a prospective new resident comes along, we will require some minimum buy-in amount and equally sell them some of our shares, that is, of course, if we agree to allow that person to buy in.”

“How are we going to do that?” asked Chris.

“Do about what?” responded Ron.

“Decide who we let buy-in, of course,” said Chris arrogantly.

“You know, Chris, I’ve been thinking about that,” said Gary, “Whenever I rented an apartment, they required me to fill out an application. I know for sure that they used it to run a credit check, verify my employment and so forth. We could start by designing our own questionnaire to elicit the basic information we need. Hell, we could even require the applicant to pay an application fee sufficient to cover our costs.

“Then, if the family checked out, I’d suggest that we invite them to a potluck at the Common House so we could meet them and they could meet us. Keep the whole thing real low-key, if you know what I mean. We could get to know them and them us. I’ll bet we could develop an outline of things we needed to know before we voted on accepting them.”

“That’s another ball of wax, if you asked me,” Fred added, “how is this voting thing going to work?”

“We have several alternatives,” answered Gary, “we could have a one-person-one-vote policy; or, we could vote on the basis of shares; or, we could develop something altogether different.”

“Like what?” Fred asked.

“In one of the stories on the Frugal Squirrel’s Forum, *Lights Out*, I think, they had a similar problem. Seems to me I recall a dual voting system made up of residents and homeowners. The homeowners were sort of like the Senate and the residents were sort of like the House; anyway, that’s what I remember,” offered Ron. “I think that we could have the homeowners, e.g., the Senate, vote their shares and we could have the residents, e.g., the House, vote on the basis of one-person-one-vote.

“That might work,” said Fred, “what do the rest of you think?”

After a brief discussion, they all agreed on the hybrid voting system. All prospective candidates would have to be accepted by both the homeowners and the residents.

“It’s getting late,” announced Ron, “but before we go, I want to give you mugs some things to think about for our next meeting. We are going to need a couple of large trucks, either 2½ ton or 5 ton. Plus we are going to need farm equipment including a

couple of diesel powered tractors; nothing exotic, maybe a couple of good used John Deere's.

"Gary has an idea about building the houses that he would like to share, I think he mentioned R values of greater than 30 for the walls and 50 for the overhead; we need to think about primary and secondary communications systems; we need to discuss the basic tools, including things like chain saws and hand tools, that we will need.

"We need to discuss a health clinic of some sort, Fred, you're the EMT, why don't you handle that one; and finally, we have an idea for a library that Linda and the girls talked about."

"Now, who wants a beer and who wants more coffee?"

## Chapter Five – More Planning

Ring...Ring...Ring

“Guess I’d better get that before the machine picks up,” Ron thought, “Hello?”

“Ron...Kathy,” said the voice on the line.

“Oh, hi Kathy, have you heard back on our offer?” Ron said.

“Sure have, why don’t we meet at O’Hara’s and I’ll tell you all about it?” encouraged Kathy.

“Gee, I’d love to Kathy; unfortunately, I’m waiting for another very important call.” Ron lied. “What did you find out?”

“Well...” Kathy said, her disappointment obvious, “they accepted your offer subject to your being able to demonstrate financing or the ability to pay for the property in full within 90 days. If you ask me, you got a good deal, a free 90 day option to purchase the property for \$330,000!”

“Then, what you’re telling me is that it’s ours?” Ron said, struggling to keep the glee he felt from his voice. ‘Better not let this woman know how happy she just made me,’ he thought smugly. “Gee, that’s great Kathy, thanks a million!” he continued.

“Oh, don’t mention it Ron, glad to help,” she said, thinking, ‘3% of \$330,000 is \$9,900...hmm...maybe I should take a trip to Puerto Vallarta...or Acapulco...or Cancun...find me a hunk and not worry about this overweight middle aged nothing.’ Call me if there is anything I can do for you.”

“Thanks for everything, Kathy,” he said, “What do we do now?”

“Just keep me informed about the financing,” she replied, anxious to end the call, “How’s Linda?”

“Uh, she fine, thanks for asking,” Ron replied, “the call I’ve been expecting is on call waiting, Kathy, and I have to run. Goodbye.”

“Bye,” click, she hung up faster than he could.

“Who was that, dear?” Linda asked.

“Kathy,” he replied.

“What did SHE want?” Linda demanded a smile pasted on her face and the venom clearly dripping from her eyeteeth.

“The seller accepted our offer, subject to our demonstration of the ability to pay,” Ron rambled, “we have a free 90-day option at \$330,000. Oh, and Kathy said to say hi.”

“I’ll bet,” Linda thought, “That woman goes through men like water through a sieve.”

“Boy, will the guys be surprised tonight,” said Ron. “Linda, I need to get a six-pack for tonight, do you need anything from the store?”

“Hang on a minute, Ron, I’m coming with you.”

“I’d better make sure Kathy didn’t make him an offer he couldn’t refuse...after all, he’s only a man,” she thought.

Later that evening at Ron and Linda’s...

“ALRIGHT,” Clarence shouted, “we really got the farm?”

“Pretty much, I guess,” Ron smiled, “but we only have 90 days to demonstrate our ability to pay for it!”

“How are we going to do that?” moaned Chris, “Even if we list our houses tomorrow, and find a ready buyer, we aren’t damn likely to have the money in 90 days.”

“Hold your horses, Chris, I have a plan, Ron said smiling, “Gary and I have about \$125,000 each, net equity in our homes. If any one of you has a similar amount, I believe we can convince my bank to make us a short term loan against our equity.”

“Well, our home is paid for,” said Clarence, “I guess if you boys are willing to risk everything you have, I guess Lucy and I can make up the difference.”

“Really? That’s great, Clarence,” said Gary, “but are you sure that Lucy will go along with you?”

“Have no fear, my man,” Clarence said smiling, “as a matter of fact, we have about \$150,000 in my retirement account!”

“Pardon me for being nosey, Clarence,” Chris stated, “but just how in the hell did you accumulate that kind of money in a retirement account?”

Clarence paused for effect, a twinkle in his eye, “By being FRUGAL, Chris.”

When the laughter died down, Ron rapped his knuckles on the table to get everyone’s attention. “Settle down, you bums,” he said, “this is getting serious now. Fred, did you give any thought to a health clinic?”



“As a matter of fact, I did, Ron,” Fred replied, “We can get everything we need from Emergency Medical Supplies. I spoke to one of the ER doctors that I know pretty well and he told me that he would give us any assistance we require. As far as our getting anything that would require a prescription, he said that he would be willing to get me any drug that’s on the squad, plus antibiotics and similar drugs

“He told me to get a list of all of everyone’s prescriptions and he would write prescriptions for all of us for a one-year supply. He also said that, if we would rather, he would order the drugs himself from a Canadian supplier he knows and save us a bunch of money and a lot of red tape.”

“That’s great, Fred, absolutely great!” Ron said, “but what is your thinking about what we should have for supplies in our clinic?”

“Ron, I presume that you intend that I be our health professional,” Fred responded, “Is that a fair assumption?”

“Yes, Fred, you hit the nail right on the head.”

“That being the case, I propose to duplicate what we carried on my old squad,” Fred responded. “The thing is, I don’t really want to practice medicine beyond my level of training. As most of you know, I was a corpsman in the Navy and a Certified Paramedic in Seattle before I moved to southern California.

“In case you don’t know, Seattle Paramedics are certified at a much higher level than those here in California and can dispense drugs even when not in contact with a doctor via radio or phone. I’ll work up a list with the doc and let you know what we need and about what it will cost. You all know, of course, that I already have most of what we need, don’t you?”

“No, how did you manage that, Fred?” Ron asked.

“You know how these hospitals are, most everything they use comes in some kind of a kit or set; you know, use once and discard,” Fred said with a grin on his face. “I’ve been Dumpster diving for about three years now. Crap man, you should see the perfectly good stuff they throw away.”

“But, is that stuff still good, after 3 years?” Chris quizzed.

“You know it, man,” Fred, retorted, “the shelf life on most drugs is five to ten years. Things like bandages and the like last forever so long as they are kept clean and put away. About the only thing that I have that should be replaced are the adhesive products and certain drugs.”

“Why those?” asked Gary.

“Some adhesives get funny, you know slimy or dried out, after a time. Drugs like epinephrine, for instance, have a definite, limited shelf life.”

“What’s epinephrine?” Chris asked.

“ADRENALINE,” they chorused.

All Chris would manage was a shrug and an, “Oh.”

“Come on guys, we have a lot more to cover,” Ron urged. “Chris, I have a project for you. Get on the Internet and find a west coast outlet for surplus military vehicles; and then, if it’s in southern California, make a run and check out their 2½ and 5-ton trucks. They are multi-fuel capable, so they’ll suit us just fine. Let me know what you find out.” Noticing Chris’s grimace, Ron asked, “Is that a problem, Chris?”

“Uh, well, you see, uh,” Chris, stammered, “I don’t know how to use the computer or the Internet. But, I can sure check out any vehicles we find!”

“Chris, does Patti know how to use the computer?” Ron chided.

“Uh, well sure she does,” Chris, replied.

“And Chris, does Patti know how to use the Internet to search for things?” Ron continued.

“Uh, well sure she does,” Chris, replied.

“Then, Chris, HAVE PATTI get on the Internet and find a west coast outlet for surplus military vehicles; and then, if it’s in southern California, YOU make a run and check out their 2½ and 5-ton trucks, Ok?”

“Uh, sure,” Chris muttered, “but why are you guys always picking on me?”

“You know, Chris,” Ron spoke softly, “I’d be willing to bet that you could completely rebuild a Chevy 350 with not much more than a screwdriver, a pair of pliers, a Crescent wrench and a box of rusty parts; but, when it comes to the really simple things in life that most of us take for granted, you couldn’t find your butt with two hands and a flashlight.”

“What do you mean by that?” Chris demanded, “Did you just insult me, again?”

“It doesn’t mean a thing Chris,” Ron replied, “not a bloody thing.”

“Gary, could you make a run to a farm implement business tomorrow?” Ron asked, “I would prefer a John Deere dealer, but for our immediate purposes, I suppose any dealer will do.”

“Sure Ron, I can handle that,” Gary replied smiling.

“Oh, and while you have the floor, Gary, this might be a good time to explain this miracle construction technique that you are so enamored with,” Ron continued.

“Sure, that’s easy, Ron,” Gary grinned. “Look guys, before he died, my dad was a snowbird. They had a home in northern Iowa for the summer and a home in Farnsworth Village East in Mesa for the winter. Dad picked that particular place after he saw how their homes were built.

“Basically, the homes have a masonry exterior, you know, brick, block, whatever. Once the footings are in, the exterior masonry erected and the slab is poured, the contractor builds a wood frame house inside of the shell. They use 2x4 construction for the framing. After the frame is erected, they spray 1” of foam onto the exposed masonry between the studs.

“Then they wire and plumb the house, install R-11 fiberglass insulation and drywall the thing. At this point, the walls have a total R value of something like 20.823 or some such number.”

Pausing for breath, Gary continued, “The only change I would make would to use 2x6 framing construction, spray 2” of foam and use R-19 fiberglass insulation. I’m pretty sure that the walls would have an R-value greater than 30. The R-value in the overhead, or ceiling, is mostly dependent upon how much insulation you use. We can either use a hammer mill and grind our own, or, buy fiberglass, it’s up to you.”

“What do you mean, make our own?” Fred asked.

“Well, there was this fellow my dad knew back in Nashua, Iowa. He bought all of the newspapers that the Boy Scouts collected on their paper drives. I believe he paid a couple of cents over the market rate. He ran the newspapers through an ordinary hammer mill and sprayed the resulting pulp with a fire retardant. Basically, the resulting product is exactly the same as the blown insulation we all have in our homes.”

“Thanks, Gary,” Ron said. “Clarence, you’re our master carpenter, what do you think of Gary’s ideas?”

“Well, let me tell you, Ron,” Clarence replied, shaking his head but with a smile, “I’ve heard about it, but I’ve never seen it. That being said, I think that Gary is right about the R-value for the walls. But, he didn’t say anything about a moisture barrier. I think that we may need a moisture barrier in Colorado; other than that, I fully support what Gary said. Gary, do you have any ideas about a moisture barrier?”

“To be honest, Clarence,” Gary stated, “I don’t have a clue. But I think you’re right, we would have to include a moisture barrier. With these dang stucco houses, I haven’t seen a moisture barrier, but who knows, this is the High Desert, after all. On the other hand, if

we need a moisture barrier, we can simply roll plastic sheeting on the frame walls and staple it in place before we tip them up, can't we?"

"You know, there's an idea," said Clarence, "it wouldn't even slow down construction. But say, I'd like to make another point. If we use slip form construction, how thick do you think the walls should be? I'd suggest 24" depending upon our supply of material."

"Clarence, why don't we go with that for now," Ron said, "it's getting late and we have a couple of more items to discuss. Is that ok with you?"

"Fine by me," Clarence replied.

"Alright, communications, Ron said, moving the discussion along. Right here and now, I propose that each family have a 40-channel SSB CB base station for their homes. In addition, each family should have one handheld 40-channel CB per family plus one GMRS/FRS radio for every member of the family. Questions?"

"Hey how much is all of that going to cost?" Chris whined. I've got 3 Motorola Radius 50 2 channel radios on the racing team and those suckers cost a bunch. Between the radios, the scanner, headsets and so forth, I have over five grand tied up in those radios. The last thing I need is a couple of grand more in radios!"

"Chill Chris," Ron insisted, "I checked out Radio Shack online just to get a point of reference. A GMRS/FRS radio with a seven mile range runs about \$40 each when they're not on sale; a dual, read that as 2-radio, charging stand runs \$30 when not on sale; and, the headphones will run you another \$20 each at full price. That's an investment of \$150 for the GMRS/FRS radios. The CB base station runs about \$200 and the handheld another \$100. The total investment will be under \$500. Is that frugal enough for you?"

"Now there you go, calling me a cheapskate, again," Chris moaned.

"Chris, I believe that I said frugal, did I not?" Ron came back, chuckling.

"Last item will be a breeze, guys," Ron continued, "Linda and the girls have some ideas about a library. I suggest we let them handle it. Can I have a second for that motion?"

In unison, everyone replied, "AYE!"

"Okay, now who wants a beer and who wants coffee?"

## Chapter Six – Supplies

“Linda?” Ron called.

“Yes, dear, what’s up?” she responded.

“Hon, I know this is short notice, but do you think you could arrange a potluck dinner for this evening?” he asked.

“Gee, Ron, I’m not sure. It’s Saturday and everyone probably has plans for tonight; why do you ask?”

“Babe, some problems have come up with our Ark project and we need a lot of extra time to mull these things over.” He answered. “Besides, we were planning on getting together at 7 pm tonight anyway. I just thought if we had a potluck we could start earlier. And, I thought we should include the wives in this discussion; you women sometimes lend a different perspective that might solve some of these issues.”

“In that case, I think we can make it happen!” she replied, inwardly smiling that her husband of 25 years might have finally realized that men needed women for something more than to cook and warm their beds.

A short time later...

“Ron?” Linda called.

“Yes, dear?” he looked up from the computer screen displaying a table of biodiesel yields per acre for various crops, “what’s up?”

“I talked to Sharon, Lucy, Patti and Jan,” she beamed. “We are all set for 4 pm.”

“Why so early?” he asked, “I thought maybe 5 pm would be early enough.”

“There you go...” she responded.

“Huh?” Ron replied dumbfounded.

“Thinking, again,” she purred, “gets you into trouble every time!”

*Ron and Linda’s dining room, about 4:45 pm the same day...*

“Well, gents,” Ron started, “while our wives clear the table, let’s dispense with the old business first. They are going to join us tonight to discuss the new business, primarily problems that have arisen since Thursday night. I’ll start off and summarize the situation regarding our purchase.”

"Fred, Chris," he continued "Clarence, Gary and I met with Tom down at Wells Fargo yesterday morning. We laid the whole thing out for him including the fact that Clarence had \$150,000 cash available, that his home was paid for and that Gary and I each had about \$125,000 net equity in our homes."

"What did he say?" Chris interrupted.

"Dang it, Chris," Ron snapped, "Did you forget to take your chill pill again? Linda?" he called to the kitchen, "Chris needs 3 Xanax and a glass of water!"

"Never mind," Chris muttered.

"Never mind, Linda," Ron called out. "To answer your question, Chris, he was agreeable, but..." Ron said, pausing for effect, "he said that it would take at least FOUR MONTHS to make it happen."

Chris groaned, "Why so long?"

"Well," Ron continued, "first there are credit checks, and then there are appraisals on the 4 properties, need I go on?"

"Where does that leave us, Ron?" Fred asked.

"Plan B!" Ron replied, smiling.

You could have heard a pin drop as everyone sat expectantly waiting for an explanation. Ron lingered, savoring the moment, realizing that this might be the only high point of the evening. He waited until it seemed that Chris was ready to open his mouth and start something. Just as Chris opened his mouth to speak, Ron continued.

"Plan B!" he announced. "On the way back from the bank, Gary suggested that he contact his banker in Iowa. You all know that when Gary's father passed he left half of his estate to Gary, in trust. Gary, why don't you take it from here?"

"My old man never did trust me!" Gary exclaimed. "My brother could do no wrong and I could do no right. So, he directed, in his will, that my half of the estate be held in a Trust Fund. I receive the income and can only access the principal in case of a real emergency."

"Well," Chris offered, "this would seem to be a real emergency to me!"

"Not so, Chris," Gary continued, "it's more like a health emergency and so forth. Anyway. I called Matt, at the bank, and laid the whole thing out for him. I explained that we had almost half of the amount in cash and that we could put up 4 pieces of property as additional collateral."

“Yes, and?” Chris urged, the anticipation nearly killing him.

“And Matt said that they wouldn’t be interested in our California property as collateral because it was too far away. However, the fact that we had a down payment of almost 50% in cash; that Colorado wasn’t so far from Iowa; and, that it was agricultural land probably meant that they would be willing to make a short term loan to cover the balance.”

“So, it’s a done deal then!” Chris exclaimed.

“Chris, the only certain things in life are death and taxes, as my father always said,” Gary said, smiling, “but, yes, I’d say that it is a done deal.”

There was applause and a couple of yells of approval from all of the men seated at the table. Just then, the ladies filed into the dining room.

“What’s all the hoopla about?” Sharon asked.

“I just explained to the guys what I worked out with Matt,” Gary answered.

“You gals sure made short work with those dishes,” Ron exclaimed.

“Honey, paper plates don’t take very long to wash!” Linda laughed.

“Page two!” Ron announced in his most Paul Harvey like voice. “Gary, you were pretty quiet Thursday night when we were discussing the radios. I forgot for a moment that you had your ham license. Do you have any ideas on the subject?”

“Had is right Ron,” Gary responded, “I passed all of the written exams through Extra Class, but couldn’t get my code speed over 9 words-per-minute. I ended up with a Coded Technician license.”

“Hey, that’s great!” said Ron.

“Not so great!” Gary retorted, “A Coded Technician license is only good for 10 years. What with being sick and all, I completely forgot to renew the license in 2002. But, I still have my Yaesu 1000 rig sitting collecting dust. I checked at Ham Radio Outlet and didn’t figure that I could get enough for it, so I decided to keep it. However, I haven’t turned the damn thing on in over two years, so I don’t even know if it still works.”

“Gary,” Ron replied, “What would it take to get your license back?”

“Ron,” Gary said, shaking his head, “I don’t have the foggiest idea. If I remember correctly, once you pass a code test, the results are permanent. I don’t know if I’d have to simply reapply or take the test over, but, I suppose I can find out. Why?”

“Gary, *The Ark* is going to need a communications center,” Ron smiled. “It occurred to me that since, one, you have a ham license and, since two, you spend your life flat on your back in bed or sitting on your butt in front of your computer, you’d be the perfect choice for our ‘Director of Communications!’”

“See, honey,” Sharon cheerfully announced, “I knew you were good for something!”

Ron smiled at Sharon’s statement, “Let’s continue folks, we still have a lot to cover. Chris, did you and Patti complete the truck project that I assigned to you?”

“I did my part!” Patti announced, “And Chris took the day off yesterday, so he probably did his part.”

“Would you folks excuse me for a few minutes?” Gary interrupted. He rose and left.

“I learned the following,” Chris said smiling for almost the first time, “Patti spent a lot of time searching the web. She didn’t find a lot. One site, gsauction dot gov listed 3 trucks available in California, but they required online bids.

“What I did instead was to check the Yellow Pages. There are seven used truck dealers in the Antelope Valley. There aren’t many good used trucks available. From my conversations, I learned that we would probably do well if we bought something with a Cummins inline-6 diesel engine. It seems that everyone had something bad to say about any brand of truck they didn’t have in stock and nothing but good to say about the ones they did have in stock.”

“I visited with a couple of mechanics,” he continued, “and they both agreed on the Cummins diesel engine. I would suggest that a month or so before we’re ready to buy the trucks, we pile in the car and make the rounds. Sorry that I couldn’t be of more help.”

Just then, Gary returned. “Hey guys, I have some good news,” he said smiling. “My license expired 2/12/2002. According to the FCC website there is a two year grace period to renew an expired license and no fee. I tried to renew it online, but the link was down. However, I got the phone number and will call on Monday and see about renewing my license.

“Great news, Gary,” Ron smiled, “We should have our bases covered on communications just fine.”

“Chris thanks for the report.” He continued, “I checked out the Survival Wheels section at the Frugal Squirrel’s website. I didn’t happen to see any links that were of much help. I’m sure the information was there, but I didn’t really have a lot of time to look. I did notice in another forum that someone had purchased a used Russian, oh I don’t know, I’ll call it a command vehicle, for a song, so the vehicles are out there, we just to need to look harder.”



Ron paused to pass out a sheet of paper to everyone attending. "I found this table on the Internet," he said. "I think that we are going to need to give further consideration to the question of electricity."

"As you can see," he continued, "soybeans only yield about 48 gallons of biodiesel per acre. Sunflowers, on the other hand, produce about 102 gallons of biodiesel per acre. If we plant 300 acres of oil producing crops, we will increase our biodiesel production from 14,400 gallons to 30,600 gallons per year. This all ties into our electrical system. A Generac MD400 generator, which has a 300kw prime power rating and a 400kw standby power rating, and running at 25% capacity, uses 8.3 gallons of diesel fuel per hour. Assuming the worst case, e.g., running the generator 24/7, it would consume 72,708 gallons of diesel in one year."

"Not to put too fine a point on it," Ron said, "but, there is just no way we can grow enough biodiesel for our vehicles, tractors and a generator. I mentioned that to David last night and he suggested that we look into an alternative electrical source. He said, as near as I can quote, *During the summer, if the roofs face south, a 2,000ft<sup>2</sup> house with a normal pitched roof has almost 1000ft<sup>2</sup> of area available for solar panels. 45-watt conventional panels (for example) are about 6ft<sup>2</sup>. That would equal the equivalent of 167, give or take, 45-watt panels or 7500 watts per house times 10 hours/day=7.5kwh per day per house.*

"David was referring to Thin-film technology asphalt shingles. He also said that you could cover the southern roof of a 2000sq ft house for less than \$3,000 more than the cost of a conventional roof including labor. The labor is the largest cost of roofing a house. The Thin-film roofing can be installed by anyone who does asphalt shingle roofing, as long as they pay attention to the wire."

"I also heard from a (frugal) squirrel who lives in the Pueblo area. He said the wind never seems to stop blowing in the Pueblo area. I would like to suggest that we consider cutting back from 4 wind turbines to 2 wind turbines, for now. That will still give us 100kw of power and would save us almost \$5,000 after we take the cost of the solar panels into consideration. Finally, we need to give the generator question a whole new think. Who knows, we might be better off putting in 5kw generators in each home."

"Clarence?" Ron asked, "What do you think of the idea of the alternative roofing?"

"Well, hell, Ron," Clarence replied, getting a poke from Lucy for cussing, "if all's you do is nail it on, it isn't any kind of a big deal. One thing though, none of us is a plumber or an electrician. Just seems to me that we needs to add a couple of more members to the group."

"Linda, it was nice of you ladies to join us this evening," Ron said, turning to his wife.

"I don't know why!" she retorted, "You men haven't let us get a word in edgewise. If Patti

hadn't said, 'I did my part,' you men would have never have known we were here."

"Not true, dear!" he quickly responded, "I would love it if you and Sharon told us about the library. And then, I like to suggest that we get each ladies opinion of what we discussed tonight."

"I don't know that there is much to tell concerning the library," Linda grudgingly replied, "Gary and Sharon have about 8,000 paperback books stored. Plus, most of us have a few books of one description or another. I think we have 5 sets of encyclopedias. On the other hand, there are a lot of books that we don't have. Sharon, you go to used book stores a lot, what do they have in them?"

Sharon blushed; she positively hated to speak before a group, even a group of friends. "Linda they have every kind of book imaginable." That was it, end of speech!

"Why don't you and Linda, in fact, why don't all of you ladies get together and make the rounds of the used book stores?" Gary suggested, giving his poor flustered wife a gentle look.

"I wouldn't know what to buy," Sharon retorted, "Every time I buy you a book, you've already read it or it's not the one you wanted or something! What kind of books do you want, anyway?"

"This is your lucky day, my dear," Gary laughed, "There is no such thing as a wrong book! Buy anything you can find on carpentry, plumbing, home repair, medicine, radios, and so forth. And buy any Chilton's Manuals you find."

"What's a Chilton's Manual?" Sharon ventured, "I've never heard of them."

"They are car books, Sharon," Patti responded, "Chris will go nuts if he has a library full of Chilton's Manuals to read."

"Alright," Ron stated, "Time to give the ladies their due. Jan, what do you think of what you've heard tonight? And, Jan, Fred hasn't really said, so I'd like to know exactly how you feel about our little project."

"In the beginning," Jan started, her voice soft, "I thought you guys were all nuts. But, the other girls and I have talked it over and I think that the idea is good. I'll have to tell you, until you GUYS decided on the voting structure, I wasn't convinced. But, since each of us actually gets a vote on things, I can live with it."

"You men have to realize that without us women, your little venture is probably doomed. After all, I somehow can't visualize you men doing laundry and cooking and canning. And I'd bet dollars to donuts that without us to sew and do all of the 'womanly' things you all take so much for granted you'd all be walking around half starved and out of your clothes." She concluded, softly humming Helen Reddy's 'I am Woman', under her

breath.

“You tell them, Jan,” Patti loudly announced, as the men imperceptibly shook their heads and groaned at the sub-audible level. “And another thing, guys, you had better start paying attention to us. Jan’s right, unless we are FULL PARTICIPANTS in this venture of yours you aren’t going to make it happen! Lucy, you haven’t said a word all evening, where do you stand? Patti asked.

“Right beside my man,” Lucy replied. “Clarence has always been good to me. He pays attention to my needs and I don’t think I’ve ever had to ask him to take out the garbage or that I want to go to the movies or the mall. He’s my angel,” she continued, “Now if I could just get him to stop cussing...” she said, giving Clarence a HARD look.

“Linda,” do you have anything to add?” Ron asked.

“Not as long as you remember who wears the pants in this family!” she snapped back, smiling.

“OK, ok, calm down” Ron demanded, trying to silence the chuckles. “I have one other thing that I’d like to discuss, with you ladies’ kind indulgence.”

“What’s that, Ron?” Chris asked, “Haven’t we covered nearly everything?”

“You know fellas,” Ron began, “we have been pretty busy discussing all the things that we need. One thing we haven’t discussed is what we already have.”

“Things? What things?” Clarence asked, looking up.

“Guns,” Ron reluctantly commented, “I think that the ladies need to be a part of this discussion.”

The men were silent, mostly looking at their hands or looking for something that had obviously dropped into their laps. The women, conversely, were all looking right at Ron, obviously all ears.

“Ladies, I want all of you to understand that a gun is a tool, as much is a hammer or a screwdriver is a tool, Ron opened, “I know that many people automatically think of a gun as a weapon, perhaps even an evil weapon, especially here in California. People get killed with hammers and screwdrivers and most people never give it a thought; however, every time someone is killed with a firearm, the media goes nuts and many, many people just shake their heads, knowing positively that a gun is an evil thing only meant for killing.”

“Now the last part is true,” he went on, “a firearm was designed for killing. Two hundred and twenty five years ago, some of the framers of our Constitution were uneasy, concluding that in addition to our inalienable rights – life, liberty and the pursuit of happi-

ness – we had other, equally important rights, which were not enumerated in the Constitution. These rights were added to the Constitution as the first ten amendments.

“I don’t know if any of you has read the Federalist Papers or any of the writings of the times; but I can assure you that none of the first ten amendments was considered to be more important than any of the others. The media would have you believe that the first amendment is the most important, simply because it is the First amendment. In the next breath, they dismiss the second amendment as not reflecting the times.”

“The US Supreme Court,” he added, “in its infinite wisdom has seen fit to ignore recent cases challenging laws generated by the gun haters and some obviously poor rulings by the lower courts. In California, the Assembly has gone nuts, in my opinion, overreacting to the schoolyard shootings in Stockton a few years back. All of the drug and gang related crime hasn’t helped matters either.”

Ron paused, noting that he had everyone’s attention. “A few nights ago, we decided on a basic arsenal for each family. We agreed that each family should have a .308 semi-auto main battle rifle, a .223 semi-auto carbine, a combo 12-gauge shotgun, a .22 caliber rifle and a handgun, preferably in .38 caliber or greater.”

At once, the room exploded into chaos. Most of the women were looking at their husbands with disbelief. Scolding seemed to be the order of the day. Notably neither Linda nor Sharon seemed to react to Ron’s last statement. Chris sat, hands upraised, shoulders shrugged with a “don’t look at me reaction.” Clarence and Fred sat quietly, ignoring their wives stares.

“If I may continue,” Ron went on, gradually lowering his voice. “Let me ask you ladies a question. All of you with driver’s licenses raise your hands.” All but Lucy tentatively raised her hand, not knowing what point Ron was trying to make. “How many of you are terrified of driving?” This time, there were no hands raised.

“I’d like to suggest that the reason that none of you are afraid of driving is that you know how to drive,” Ron suggested, “Is there anyone that totally disagrees with that?” When no hands were raised, he continued. “I would also imagine that some of you guys aren’t any different from the ladies; am I wrong, Chris?”

“I just don’t like guns!” Chris responded. “They give me the willies.”

“Fair enough,” Ron responded, “but have you ever fired a gun?”

“Of course!” Chris retorted.

“Have you ever owned a gun?” Ron came back.

“Nope,” Chris said, shaking his head.

“But, Chris, you didn’t really raise much of an objection the other evening when the subject came up, why is that?”

“Well, you know, I didn’t want to make waves,” Chris responded quietly, “Besides, at the time, I didn’t think the plan had a snowball’s chance in hell of succeeding.”

“And now, Chris, that the plan for *The Ark* is but a short step from reality, what do you think?” Ron asked.

“Well I suppose that I’m going to have to rethink where I stand,” Chris said plainly.

“So you see ladies, not to pick on Chris,” Ron said, his hand rose to belie any objection Chris might have, “You are not the only individuals around the table with concerns about firearms. Is there any person at this table who absolutely refuses to at least become familiar with firearms?” Surprisingly not a single hand rose in response to Ron’s question.

“How about the ten of us making a trip to the range tomorrow afternoon?” Ron suggested, “Does anyone have an objection?”

When no hands were raised, Ron said, “Well good! I think that’s a wrap. Now, would any of you ladies care for a cocktail or another cup of coffee?”

## Chapter Seven – Old Deadeye

Around 1 pm, Sunday at Ron and Linda's...

"Hey Ron," Gary yelled, "Where are we going to go to shoot? They closed the range up in the Angeles National Forest, didn't they?"

"I made arrangements to use the range at the Rod and Gun Club," Ron smiled. "Alright, does everyone have their weapons? And, are they cased and unloaded?" Those with weapons nodded or murmured in the affirmative. "Let's take 3 cars. Put the weapons in the trunk and let's get going."

Fifteen minutes later, they were at the Rod and Gun Club range, piling out of the cars. "Put your weapons on the tables," *Ron said, "I want to cover some basics for those of you who are unfamiliar with firearms. Treat every gun as if it is loaded. Never point a gun at anything you don't intend to shoot. Keep your finger off the trigger until the sights are on the target. Be sure of your target and what is behind it. Any questions, so far?"* Everyone shook his or her head.

"Alright, everyone uncase their weapons and lay them back on the table," he continued. Starting with his own guns, Ron continued, "Okay, let me explain some of the features of each of these weapons. This..." he said, picking up a weapon, "...is a Ruger, single action .41 magnum, my favorite. Ruger is the manufacturer. The action is single action, which means that you have to cock the hammer before the weapon will fire, and the weapon is a revolver, meaning the cartridges are stored in this revolving cylinder," he demonstrated, after verifying that the weapon was, indeed, empty.

Laying the Ruger aside, he picked up a semi-auto. "This is a Browning Hi-Power semi-auto. The caliber is 9mm, about the same as a .38 caliber. The cartridges are stored in a magazine, sometimes erroneously called a clip, which is inserted into the grip of the weapon. This particular magazine is old and it holds 13 rounds. Unlike the Ruger revolver, this weapon has numerous safeties.

"First, it won't fire without a live round in the chamber; second, this little lever on the left side locks the action to prevent the weapon from being fired; third, even though it is called a semi-auto, it is a single action mechanism. That means that you have to cock the hammer before you can fire the weapon the first time. And finally, this weapon has what is called a box magazine safety. That prevents the weapon from being fired unless a magazine is inserted in the magazine well. The first thing I did when I brought the weapon home was to remove the box magazine safety."

"Why would you do that?" Chris wanted to know, "Wouldn't you be better off with all of the safeties intact?"

"I can answer that one, Chris," Gary chimed in, "say, for instance, that you are in a fire fight and inadvertently drop your magazine. Just at that moment, some bad guy gets the

drop on you. Now, even though the magazine is out of the weapon, you still have a round in the chamber. Because you had the forethought to remove the box magazine safety, your weapon will still fire and you have a chance to defend yourself.”

“Firefight!” Chris responded in a raised voice, “I’m not getting into any firefights!”

“Chris,” Ron replied, “we’re getting ahead of ourselves. Let’s stick to the matters at hand. But, before I proceed, let me ask you one question, what would you do if someone attacked *The Ark* and tried to harm Patti?”

“I’d stop them, of course!” Chris retorted.

“With what, Chris, your MIG welder?” Ron snorted. “Or maybe you’d go up against a heavily armed bad guy with a ball peen hammer?”

“Well, I…” Chris started, and then shut up.

“Look people, I’m not putting Chris down,” Ron said sharply, “But, any of you with the mindset that this is an exercise in futility, and that you will never, ever, be in a position where you have to fire a weapon in self-defense had better wake up and smell the roses. God willing, maybe you never will be put in that position, but, if things go to hell in a handcart, who knows which might happen?”

Ron figured that he’d better drop it at that for the moment. He continued explaining the characteristics of each of the weapons laid out on the table. “Um, he thought, “We have a long ways to go before everyone has a basic arsenal. Gary is the only person with a main battle rifle. On the other hand, I do have a Remington model 700 30-06, I suppose that that might qualify.”

“Gary?” Ron asked, “What’s this little semi-auto you have here, I’ve never seen one like this before.”

“Ron, that little gun has quite a history,” Gary responded. “A friend of my dad’s, LeRoy Nelson, took it off of a dead Nazi in France during WW II. It’s a Sauer und Sohn 7.65 Browning model 38H, probably manufactured during 1938. It uses standard .32 auto ammo. Dad always wanted that gun and before LeRoy died, he managed to talk him into selling it to him for \$100.

“The last time we were in Phoenix, dad said that he wasn’t going to live forever and that Sharon and I could each pick one gun from his collection. I figured that this was about as close as I’d ever get to having a Walther PPK, so I picked it. Must have been a personally owned weapon though; I could be wrong, but I don’t think that Hitler ever issued them to his troops (wrong). Anyway, that puny little .32 auto cartridge doesn’t have much knockdown power, but it gives me a reasonable backup.”

“Ok, folks,” Ron continued, “I’ve drawn up a couple of pictures to explain sight patterns

to you. We are going to use a 6" bullseye at 100 yards for the rifles. We will sight the weapons using a 6 o'clock hold. A 6 o'clock hold on open sights means that you align the top of the front blade sight with the top of the rear sight and rest the bullseye on top of the aligned sights. When your weapon hits dead center, it is striking about 3' high at 100 yards.

"I don't know if any of you know who Jack O'Connor was, but he recommended that a rifle be sighted in to shoot 3 inches high at 100 yards. That way, you are dead on at about 300 yards. Oh, one more thing, I brought a couple of bags of disposable earplugs. Everyone be sure to use earplugs when we start shooting. You don't want to end up deaf in your right ears like Gary," he said chuckling.

First, Ron set up the 6" targets at 100 yards and worked with each person, in turn, until they could put most of their rounds in the bullseye at 100 yards. Surprisingly, Jan was a dead shot. Even more surprising, Lucy, who was very timid around the weapons, had a determination to learn that he hadn't expected. And, low and behold, Chris was almost as good a shot as Jan. Ron couldn't believe the smile on Chris's face after Chris had shot a 2' group with Gary's main battle rifle. "Well," he thought, "the M1A is pretty accurate, I think that all Chris needs is practice and an attitude change."

Next, Ron set up full sized silhouettes at 50'. Since it was getting late, he decided to limit everyone to shooting two weapons, his Hi-Power and Clarence's .38. "Folks, this has been fun," he announced, "But, it is getting late and I want everyone to have a chance at shooting a handgun. I've set up at target known as a silhouette.

"Obviously, it is an outline of a man. I want you to aim your weapon at the center of the mass. In other words, right about where the breastbone would be on a real person. I'm going to limit each of you to 6 shots with each of the two guns for today. I'm not so much interested in getting each of you to be a good shot as I am in getting you over your fear of a handgun. Jan, do you want to go first?"

Jan stepped to the line, took the .38 Ron offered and put 6 shots dead center. She exchanged weapons with Ron and put 6 9mm bullets in a tight little group. "Um, I wonder," Ron thought to himself, "Do you suppose that the silhouette of a man has anything to do with her being so accurate?"

*Later at Ron and Linda's...*

"Alright folks," Ron stated after he had gotten out of the car, "Linda made sandwiches for everyone; why don't we have a quick bite to eat and discuss this afternoon for a few minutes?"

As they sat around the table, Jan was the first one to speak. "That was fun, I had no idea how easy it was to shoot a gun," she said.

"Part of it, Jan," Gary said, "Is the fact that you've never shot before. You didn't have



any bad habits to unlearn.” Turning, Gary said, “Chris you’ve had a grin from ear to ear most of the afternoon, what’s with you?”

“To be honest,” Chris replied, “That was fun. I don’t know that I could shoot someone, regardless of the circumstances, but I’m not as put off by the guns as I thought I would be. I guess you guys were right, they are just a tool.”

Lucy spoke up next, “Well, I’m still a bit frightened of guns, but Chris is right, it’s not so bad, once you know how to handle them.”

“Yeah,” Patti said, “I don’t know why Chris has never had a gun before, as well as he shoots.”

“Patti,” Chris responded, “I just didn’t want to have guns in a house with Daniel.” Daniel was their 21-year old, severely retarded son. “Can you imagine what would happen if he got his hands on a gun? He’s a 3-year old, mentally; I can just see him shooting you and me and Matt.”

“Chris, that’s one reason why they build gun safes,” Ron pointed out. “And while I’m on the point, who besides Gary and I has a gun safe?” No hands were raised. “Well, do those of you without safes at least have trigger locks for your guns?” he continued. Again, no hands were raised. “Dang,” he laughed, “I’m not going to visit ANY of your homes until you make those guns safe!”

They continued to visit and one by one it became clear that not one of the ten had any real opposition to firearms. “Well,” Ron thought, “I was right. It was more fear of the unknown than anything else.”

“Let’s make a list of what firearms we have and what we are going to need,” Gary suggested. “I’ll start off. We have a M1A, a .32 semi-auto and a .22 semi-auto Saturday night special. We are going to need a Mini-14, a Remington 870 combo, a .22 caliber rifle plus two handguns, one for Sharon and one for me. I’d prefer to get a Winchester 9422 .22 caliber rifle. And since my hands are so numb from the neuropathy, I think semi-auto pistols are pretty much out for Sharon and me. I think we’ll go with Ruger SP101’s in .357 caliber with 4 inch barrels. I’ll also pick up a dozen speed loaders.”

“Chris,” Ron said, “You are going to need everything, including a gun safe. Do you have any ideas about what you want to purchase?”

“Well,” Chris began, “I guess an M1A, a Mini-14, a Remington 870 combo, whatever that is, a .22 caliber rifle like yours, Ron, and a couple of Browning Hi-powers. Patti, do you agree?”

“Chris,” Patti responded, “This is the first time in 20 years that you ever asked my opinion about anything! I was thinking that Ron’s Springfield Armory 1911 was a better handgun. What do you think?”

“Sure, that’s fine with me,” Chris responded, “I just wasn’t sure that you would be comfortable with a big gun like a .45 auto. I’m glad I asked,” he continued, “At least we won’t have to fight about that!”

“Clarence,” Ron continued, “You have a model 12 Winchester 12-gauge, a Remington model 504 .22 rimfire and the Smith and Wesson .38. What are your thoughts?”

“I’ll tell you, Ron,” Clarence replied, “I don’t really want to buy another shotgun. Maybe I can get a 20” barrel for the model 12. I’m a pretty fair shot with the Remington so I don’t think I’ll get another .22 caliber rifle. Lucy can have the .38. I think I’ll follow Gary’s lead and go with the Ruger .357 magnum for myself. As for a MBR, those M1A’s are pretty expensive. I didn’t get money in the bank by spending it. Maybe the dealer will have something used that I can get.”

“Good idea Clarence!” Ron stated, “As a matter of fact, “Since I already have a 30-06, I was thinking of getting one of the used Garand’s that she has. I’m pretty sure that she has two; at least, she did last week when I stopped by the shop. I have plenty of handguns, so I’m set there. And, I have a Mini-14 Ranch rifle that will do for now. I need to get a 26” barrel for my Remington Defender shotgun. And, of course, I have the Ruger 10/22 so I’m covered there. Fred, you’ve hardly said a word all day, how about you?”

“Ron, all I have is the Taurus 9 mil,” Fred replied. Turning to Jan, he said, “Jan, you’re one hell of a shooter, you’ve been holding out on me. What do you think we should buy?”

“Fred,” she began, “I want a M1A and I think you should have one too. As for the rest of the guns, we can go with the list you GUYS worked up, except, I want something better in a handgun!”

Taken aback at his wife’s response,” Fred said, “And just what would that be, Jan?”

“You know,” she said, “Ron let me shoot his .41 mag a little. He said that it had about the same recoil as a .44 mag. I want a Colt Anaconda .44 mag!”

“For a city girl who never fired a gun before, you have some strange ideas,” Fred chuckled. “Ok dear, I’ll look for an Anaconda .44 mag. plus, of course, a safe.”

“It would seem,” Ron, announced, “That we have the firearm situation well in hand. Frankly, I didn’t expect all of you to come around so soon. I guess we should consider that matter settled.”

“There’s just one thing, but it’s a different subject,” Gary offered. “We bought the Colorado property sight unseen. Wouldn’t it make sense for some of us to drive back to Colorado and see what we bought?”

"I can go," Ron announced, "Who else can make it?"

"I can't get time off from my job on so short of notice," Chris offered, "I'll have to pass."

"With all the money I'm spending on guns," Fred said, "I'm a bit short on cash. If you don't mind, I would like to pass, too. Besides, Ron, you're sort of the unofficial leader here, I'll trust your judgment."

"I'm in," Gary announced, "It will be nice to get out of the house."

"Ron," Clarence offered, "I'm pretty much healed up from my surgery, I'll go if my doctor says it's ok."

"What about you ladies?" Ron asked, "Do any of you want to go?"

"Ron," Linda suggested, "I don't believe that we should go. In the first place and, it's not that I don't trust everyone; it would be unseemly for a woman to go without her husband, I'm sure that Jan and Patti would agree. In the second place, if Sharon, Lucy and I go, that will make 6 adults in one car for a 900-mile trip. I just think that that would be too much. So, if Lucy and Sharon agree, I say that the three of you should make the trip by yourselves."

"Fine by me," Sharon said.

"Me, too," Lucy announced.

"Great!" Ron said. "Maybe we should get Kathy to go along since she is the realtor."

"OVER YOUR DEAD BODY!" Gary and Linda shouted in unison.

"One final problem, folks," Ron announced, "You can only buy one handgun in a 30-day period. How are we going to handle that?"

"Why don't those of us who need two handguns take their wife along? She can buy her own handgun," Gary offered. "When do you want to go to the gun store?"

"She said that we could make an afterhours appointment," Ron replied, "Why don't I set it up for tomorrow night? And, if she still has the two Garand's, I'll ask her to hold them for us, ok?"

"I have a question!" Chris announced. "Here we have been talking about guns all day and not once has anyone said anything about ammunition. What are we going to do about ammunition?"

"Chris," Gary said, "I think that we can get most of what we need online. We can either buy it from Ammoman or from the Ammunition Store or any number of places online."

“OK, but how much ammo are we going to need?” Chris responded.

“For starters,” Ron said, “I would think about 1,000 rounds of .308 per rifle, the same in .223, at least 250 rounds of 12-gauge and 10 bricks of .22.”

“Geez!” Chris exclaimed, “That’s A LOT of ammunition!”

“Not really, Chris,” Gary injected, “When it’s all said and done, I’d prefer that we have about 5,000 rounds each of .308 and .223, some of it surplus and some of it match grade. Plus, I’d like to have a minimum mixture of shells for my shotgun consisting of 250 rounds each of slug, 00 buck, flechettes, and number 6 shot. God willing, I’d have the same amount in #4 buck and #2 shot. I’d prefer to have 10 bricks of the high velocity stuff, 10 bricks of the hyper stuff, and a brick of the low velocity stuff, if you’re talking .22 rimfire ammo.

“Gee, you sound like you’re planning on a war!” Chris exclaimed.

“Maybe, maybe not,” Ron responded, “But in a SHTF scenario, that really isn’t a lot of ammunition. And, while we’re on the subject, I’d prefer that everyone have at least 7 high capacity magazines for each magazine fed weapon.”

“Forgive my ignorance,” Chris said, “But what is a high capacity magazine?”

“Chris, you know the Hi-power that you shot today?” Ron asked.

“Yeah, what about it?” Chris asked.

“The magazine, as you may recall, held 13 rounds. Some states, including California, limit the size of magazines. What’s more, there is a federal ban on high capacity magazines manufactured after 1994. Only cops and the military can have them, legally.”

“Explain it more,” Chris urged.

“Not every state bans the so called pre-ban high capacity magazines,” Ron continued. “In fact, the California law is the most restrictive. Once we get to Colorado, we should be able to buy all of the high capacity magazines we want.”

“You know, there’s an alternative,” Gary suggested.

“What do you mean?” Chris asked.

“Both of my sons live in Iowa and Iowa does not ban high capacity magazines,” Gary replied.

“Well, Chris, do you know what a straw man purchase is, beyond being illegal, I mean?”

Gary continued.

“I have no idea what a straw man purchase is, legal or illegal,” he replied.

“In terms of the present conversation,” Gary said, “It simply means that we send my boys some money, they buy the magazines, and then they ship them to us. Simple.”

“But that’s illegal, right?” Chris suggested.

“Yep, and, I’d never suggest that anyone break the law,” Gary smiled, “But, I won’t tell if you don’t.”

Chris groaned.

“Well, folks,” Ron said, “It’s been a long day, and tomorrow will be even longer. What do you think, should we head for Colorado on Tuesday?”

## Chapter Eight – Financing

Monday morning at Gary and Sharon's home...

"Hey, honey, I did it!" Gary said, entering the kitchen.

"Did what, dear?" Sharon asked, looking up from her book.

"I called the FCC," he gleefully replied, "I talked to a gal named Angel and explained my problem. She said that the link had been repaired. I went online and renewed my Tech Plus license."

"That's nice, dear," Sharon said, returning to her novel.

"Um," he thought, "If that's all the reaction I'm going to get, I'll keep quiet about this, remembering how thrilled I'd been when I first received his license and, at the same time, how disappointed I'd been about not being able to get my code speed to 13-words-per-minute. Hell, if I'd just stuck with it, I'd have an Extra Class license. I guess I just give up too easy," he thought, being harder on himself than need be.

"It had been a snap to pass all of the written exams; although, he had bought a special calculator at Radio Shack and spent endless hours learning how to make the computations required on the Extra Class exam. And, the thing was, his Yaesu model 1000 that he'd purchased back in 1992 had so much more capacity than he could legally use. Oh well, in a SHTF scenario, he doubted that the FCC would be around checking licenses anyway."

Just then, the phone began to ring. "Probably another bill collector," he thought, "Sharon can answer it."

"Honey...phone," Sharon called out.

"Who is it?" he asked.

"It's Matt at the bank," she replied.

"Hi, Matt, what's up?" he inquired.

"Gary," Matt responded, "We are going to approve the loan for a period of 12 months. However, you, Ron and Clarence will need to come to Iowa to sign the papers. We are going to make a signature loan and not bother with mortgages on any properties."

"Hey, Matt," Gary bubbled, "That's great. Ron, Clarence and I are leaving for Colorado tomorrow. We will just continue to Iowa and sign the papers. Besides, I haven't seen the boys in a couple of years. In fact, not since dad died."

"When do you expect to be here?" Matt asked.

"Let's see, tomorrow is Tuesday," Gary said, "Figure two days to get there, a day looking around and two more days to get to Iowa. That would get us to Charles City on Sunday. How about we see you Monday morning?"

"That will be fine, Gary," Matt replied, "See you around 9 am Monday."

"Strange," Gary thought, "How when things look like they're never going to work out, they all come together."

Gary picked up the phone and dialed.

"Hello?" Linda answered.

"Linda, this is Gary," he replied, "Is Ron handy?"

"He's out feeding the raccoon," she said, "Can I have him call you back?"

"Normally, I say yes," he responded, "But, this is really important, can you call him to the phone?"

"Wait a minute, he just came in." she replied.

"What's up guy?" Ron asked.

"I just had a call from the bank," Gary reported, excitedly.

"What's wrong now?" Ron groaned.

"Not one thing buddy!" Gary exclaimed. "In fact, they are going to make us a signature loan for 12-months and there aren't going to be any mortgages. The only thing is...."

"I knew it!" Ron said, "There's always a hook."

"Yeah, Ron there is, but this one might just work out," Gary exclaimed.

"What do you mean, buddy?" Ron asked.

"We have to go to Iowa to sign the loan papers," Gary replied, "And I was just thinking that we could visit the boys while we were back in Iowa. I'm going to call Derek as soon as I hang up. I'll FedEx him \$1,400 and have him pick up 40 20 round M-14 magazines."

"Now there's an idea," Ron said, warming a little.

"There's more, Ron," Gary was beginning to bubble, "You know that he's in the National Guard, right?" Gary went on, not waiting for a response. "Anyway, his unit got called up to go to Kosovo. They have to go to Ft. Stewart, GA for three months of refresher training, and then to Germany for a month of additional training, and finally to Kosovo for 6 months. They are going to be stationed in someplace called Grijlane. But, that's not the worst of it, he thinks that there is a good chance that, after they get back, they'll be sent to Iraq."

"God!" Ron replied, "I don't like the sounds of that!"

"I don't either," Gary reluctantly admitted. "He's a gunner on an Abrams and I suppose that he'll be safe enough...but, all the same, I don't like it. Anyway, this will be a chance for me to see him before he leaves for Ft. Stewart."

"That will be good, Gary," Ron cheerfully replied.

"Yep, but, there's more!" Gary went on.

"More?" Ron quizzed.

"Yep, did I ever tell you what Derek does for a living?" Gary asked.

"Can't say as you ever did," Ron responded.

"He's a plumber!" Gary responded, grinning.

"What are you suggesting?" Ron asked.

"Remember that Clarence said that we needed a plumber and an electrician?" Gary asked back.

"Yes," Ron responded, "And you think that we have solved our plumber problem, right?"

"I'd say so," Gary responded, "When I talked to him a couple of weeks ago, the subject of Iraq came up. I asked him what he'd do if it looked like he would be sent to Iraq. Now don't get me wrong, Ron, my son is a patriot. But, he said that if that happened, he expected that most of his unit, himself included, would resign from the Guard. He went on to say that if he wanted to be full-time military, he would have stayed in. He sure doesn't think much of the Clintonistas and their gutting of the military."

"What about your other son, Damon, isn't it?" Ron asked.

"Well, Damon is a bit of a flake," Gary admitted, "But, he was an ET in the Navy, and a good one if he is to be believed."

"He got out early, didn't he?" Ron remembered, "What happened?"



“You know, Ron, I don’t really know.” Gary said. “He told me that there was some problem with a balky piece of equipment. Every time he pulled it and put it on the bench, it worked fine; and, every time he’d reinstall the unit, it would work for a while and crap out. It seems that some Chief accused him of gundecking. Anyway, he got so mad that he threatened to kill the Chief. The next thing he knew, they had him locked up in the nut ward. I guess that he decided that he was sick of the Navy, or, maybe, his wife did. Anyway, he milked it for all it was worth and ended up with a section 8 discharge.”

“That’s not so hot,” Ron commented.

“No, Ron it’s not!” Gary exclaimed, “But, somewhere along the line, his paperwork got screwed up and he ended up with an Honorable discharge.”

“Um, lucky boy,” Ron mused.

“You know, Ron,” Gary responded, “I always suspected that the Captain of the ship knew that the Chief’s comment was a bit out of line; and, he was responsible for the Honorable Discharge.”

“Well, you never know,” was all that Ron had to say.

“Ron, have you heard from Clarence?” Gary inquired.

“Nope,” Ron answered.

“Ok, I’ll call him,” Gary said. “I wasn’t going to mention it, but, I called the FCC this morning.”

“Oh, how did that go?” Ron asked anticipation in his voice.

“Great!” Gary answered, “I was able to renew my Tech Plus license.”

“Hell, partner,” Rob laughed, “That’s the best news I’ve heard all day. Good for you!”

Gary fairly beamed, his chest puffing up, “Thanks, Ron, I appreciate that, *more than ever you’ll know*” he thought, “I’d better be going, see you this evening.”

“Ciao, partner,” Ron replied and hung up.

Gary pressed the button, got a dial tone and dialed Clarence’s number.

“Hello?” Lucy answered.

“Hi, Lucy, it’s Gary, is Clarence there?” he asked.

“Sure, just a minute,” she said.

“Gary!” Clarence said, perpetually gleeful, “What’s happening?”

“Clarence, we got a signature loan for the property, but we have to drive on back to sign the papers; is that going to be a problem?” Gary inquired.

“No, of course not!” Clarence responded. “I talked to the Doctor first thing this morning and he said that as long as I take it easy and let you guys do the driving, it’s no problem.”

“Great,” Gary replied, “I’ll see you tonight, ok?”

“Later, man,” Clarence said and hung up.

*Monday evening, at the gun shop...*

“Melissa, I’d like you to meet Clarence, Fred, Jan, Gary, Chris and Patti.” Ron said.

“What can I do for you folks?” Melissa asked.

“Melissa, I have a list,” Ron replied, handing Melissa the list that he’d made up as they talked the previous evening.

“What are you guys going to do?” she asked, “Start World War III?”

“Not at all, Melissa,” Ron stated. “It’s just that I finally persuaded the folks here that we should all have a basic arsenal of firearms.”

“Well, you know, of course, that I can’t sell anyone more than one handgun per 30 day period,” Melissa offered.

“Yes, we discussed that,” Ron said. “We decided that each person should buy their own handgun; that’s why the ladies, here, came along. I wrote the name of the purchaser next to each firearm.”

“Well, ok...what’s this?” she asked looking up, “A .44 mag for Jan?”

“That’s what I want,” Jan replied, smiling.

“That’s a lot of handgun for a pretty thing like you,” Melissa commented. “What barrel length do you want? All the other hand guns have barrel lengths listed, except for your .44 mag.”

“Six inch barrel,” Jan responded, “And, while we’re at it, I want a Bianchi, X15 shoulder holster for the revolver!”

Everyone just stood there, his or her mouth hanging open.

“Uh, Jan?” Fred puzzled, “When did you become so knowledgeable about things like holsters?”

“Fred,” she retorted, “I figured, in for a penny, in for a pound. Besides, I don’t want to walk around like Wyatt Earp with a gun hanging on my hip; it will just get in the way. So, dear, I went out on the Internet and shopped around; you know how much I like to shop. In fact, I think all of we ladies ought to have shoulder holsters.”

“Oh my God!” Ron thought, “I’ve created a monster!”

## Chapter Nine – The Gunshop

*The gun shop, a little later...*

“Clarence?” Melissa asked, “Yes, ma’am?” he responded.

“I can get you a 20 ½” barrel for your model 12 without any problem,” she explained, “But, you know, don’t you, that the barrels on a model 12 require gunsmith installation?”

“No ma’am, didn’t know that,” he replied.

“What’s the condition of your model 12?” she asked.

“Well, ma’am,” he replied, “It’s just like new. Don’t suppose that I’ve fired more than a dozen boxes of shells through it in all the years I’ve had it. I takes real good care of it,” he added.

“I’ll tell you what, Clarence,” she said, “I’ve got a customer who has been pestering me to find him a good model 12. By the time I get you the barrel, install it and so forth, you’re going to be out a couple of hundred dollars, maybe more. How about I take the model 12 in trade, assuming that it’s as nice as you say, against a model 870 Remington combo? I’ll do that for \$200. What do you say?”

“I sure do hate to part with the model 12,” he said, “But I expect there’s an advantage to our all having the same model of shotgun...ok, you have a deal.”

“Folks, I think that about covers it,” Melissa said, “all of the yellow sheets are filled out, I’ve verified your id, and have all of your orders. Of course, there is the waiting period, but I’ll have everything in by the time it’s up. How do you propose to pay for all of this?”

“Why is that important?” Ron asked.

“Like I told you Ron,” she replied, “I can give you all a 10% discount off my lower than market prices. However, the prices include the 3% I have to pay the bank to process credit cards. If you can all manage to pay cash, I’ll give you folks another 3% off.” She said smiling.

“Do you take checks?” he inquired, smiling.

The purchases made, the group piled into their cars and headed home. Everyone was tired and needed a good night’s sleep. Ron, for one, wasn’t looking forward to all of the driving over the course of the next two weeks. They hadn’t talked about it, but he hoped that Gary would volunteer his Buick Park Avenue Ultra for the trip. “Man,” he thought, “That’s the nicest riding car I ever been in.”

“How’d it go honey?” Linda asked, as Ron flopped down in his recliner.

“Pretty good,” he mumbled, “Surprisingly, Chris never batted an eye when he shelled out over \$4,000 for six guns and a safe. Clarence ended up trading in his model 12 for a Remington shotgun, I think it may have bothered him a little, but he didn’t complain. Jan was, well, Jan. That girl is something else! She not only knew what barrel length she wanted, but she had been shopping on the net and knew exactly what she wanted for a holster. In fact, she suggested that all of you ladies wear shoulder holsters.”

“I suppose that might be ok...” Linda responded, “Ron we’re not all going to be walking around carrying guns all of the time are we?”

“No, Lyn,” he responded, using his affectionate nickname for his wife, “Not unless the SHTF! Otherwise, we’ll just be a community of friends, working together for the common good, so to speak.”

“Got any coffee?” Gary asked, entering the kitchen.

“Hello to you too, dear!” Sharon chided. “No, but I’ll make some.”

“Sorry, dear, I know it’s a lame excuse, but I’m one tired old man tonight.” He said apologetically.

“Derek called,” She reported.

“Oh, what did he have to say?” he asked.

“He said to tell you that the Ammoman was sold out of M-14 magazines; he said he’d hold your check until you told him what to do with it.” Sharon stated.

“Sharon, will you call him in the morning and tell him that you’re sending another \$300?” Gary asked. “Tell him to get the magazines from Rguns dot net. They’ll cost an extra \$5 each, but at least we’ll have them. Did you tell him that I was coming back to Iowa?”

“Yes dear,” she responded, cheerfully.

“And...?” he continued.

“He was really excited!” Sharon announced. “I told him that you would be there either Monday night or Tuesday morning.”

“Great!” he exclaimed. “You know, don’t you, that I have to turn in the Park Avenue tomorrow morning before we leave?”

“Why tomorrow?” she asked, “I’ll bet Ron was counting on riding in it for the trip.”

“The lease is up on Friday,” he said, “And we’ll be gone. Besides, I was thinking that it

would make more sense to take Ron's Pathfinder; it has four-wheel drive."

"You'll pardon me if I'm not there when you tell him," Sharon chuckled.

The next morning, about 9 am...

"Ron?" Gary spoke into the phone, "Gary. I just got back from the Buick dealer's."

"Getting the car serviced for the trip?" Ron inquired.

"No, turning it in, I'm afraid," Gary reluctantly admitted.

"TURNING IT IN?" Ron exclaimed. "I thought that we were going to drive it back to Iowa!"

"Partner," Gary offered, "The lease is up on Friday; I didn't really have much of a choice. Besides, I thought that we should take your Pathfinder since it has 4-wheel drive."

"Well, I'd better get it down to Jiffy Lube and get it serviced," Ron grumbled, "Call Clarence and let him know that we probably won't be out of here much before 11 am."

"Ok Boss," Gary replied, "Sorry!"

"Clarence?" Gary asked, gripping the phone.

"Gary!" Clarence answered, "What's up?"

"Ron and I will pick you up at around 11 am," Gary announced.

"Ok Gary, but why so late?" Clarence inquired.

"It's a long story, Clarence," Gary replied, "We'll be taking the Pathfinder and Ron has to get it serviced."

"Oh. Ok Gary," Clarence responded, an unasked question obvious from his tone of voice, "See you guys around 11."

"You ready, Gary?" Ron asked.

"As ready as I'm going to get," Gary responded.

"Are you sure you have everything?" Ron demanded.

"Give me a break, will you!" Gary exclaimed.

"Sure, partner," Ron replied, "Thing is that I'd hate to get half way to Pueblo and have

you suddenly remember that you forgot your insulin or something. I swear you're the most forgetful person I know."

Gary loaded his duffle bag, his gun case and a small suitcase into the back of the Pathfinder. He got in the passenger side and announced, "Let's hit the road."

Clarence was standing waiting patiently in his driveway when they arrived."

"Hi boys," Clarence smiled, "Ron, pop the lid on this thing and let me load up."

"Clarence, would you prefer to sit in front or the back?" Gary asked.

A big grin spread on Clarence's face. "Why, I'll take the back," he replied, "I always did fancy the idea of being chauffeured around by a couple of WHITE boys," he continued, laughing out loud.

As they started out, Gary asked, "Ron, which way are we headed?"

"138 to 18 to I-15 to I-40 to Albuquerque," Ron replied. "We'll pick up I-25 there and go north to Pueblo. Sit back and relax, Gary, I'm way ahead of you."

"Sounds like you've made the trip before," Gary retorted.

"Nope, never have," Ron chuckled, "But you did back in 1992, remember? MY memory is not as bad as yours; I remember the route you told me you took."

The friends made small talk for the next couple of hours. First Gary, and then Clarence eventually dozed off. A few miles east of Barstow, Ron took an exit and pulled into a gas station.

"Alright guys, wake up!" he announced.

"We need gas already?" Gary asked, slowly waking.

"No, I just have to tap a kidney," Ron replied. "It's those dang water pills. But, we might as well empty our tanks, fill up the gas tank and grab a cup of coffee while we're at it. Clarence, you look rested, can I persuade you to drive the next leg to Needles?" Ron asked.

"Shore Ron," Clarence replied, "Be glad to. I knowed you'd have me chauffeuring you guys before too long," he continued, a twinkle in his eye.

"OK gents," Clarence announced a while later, "Needles, CA! How about some lunch?"

"Lunch?" Gary whined, "It's the middle of the afternoon."

“Hey, don’t blame me!” Clarence responded, feigning anger, “I wasn’t ME playing musical cars half the morning.”

After a late lunch/early dinner, they took care of necessities, filled the tank and Gary took over the driving chores. “Next stop, Holbrook,” he announced. They chatted for a while, eventually the monotony of the drive lulling Ron and Clarence to sleep. Gary set the cruise control for 75 mph and relentlessly motored along. It was well after dark when he took the Holbrook exit. Ron and Clarence were awake, visiting between themselves.

After dinner (Gary was surprised at how much food Ron always managed to put down) they fueled the Pathfinder and checked into a motel. They took turns calling home to check in with their wives.

“I don’t know about the two of you,” Ron said, “But it’s been a long day. I suggest we turn in and get an early start tomorrow. With any kind of luck, we’ll be in Pueblo tomorrow evening. We’d have been there sooner if Gary hadn’t waited to the last minute to play musical cars,” he laughed, not missing an opportunity to pull his best friend’s chain.

Early the next morning, they showered, dressed and piled into the Pathfinder.

“How about we have breakfast in Gallup?” Ron suggested.

“How far is that?” Gary asked, “I can’t go too long before I eat. I’ve already taken my insulin.”

“It’s about 90 miles Gary,” Ron replied evenly, “Can you hold out for an hour and a half?”

“Sure, no problem,” Gary replied.

Two hours later, they had eaten and were topping off the tank. “Gary,” Ron said, “why don’t you drive the next leg? For whatever reason, we seem to make better time when you’re driving. Besides, you’ve made the trip before. Do you have any idea how far we are from Albuquerque?”

“Oh, maybe 140 or 150 miles,” Gary offered. “It’s only 7 am, we should be in Santa Fe well before lunch, and it’s only a couple of hundred miles. And, Pueblo is only a couple of hundred miles beyond Santa Fe. With any kind of good luck, we can be in Pueblo sometime this afternoon.”

They resumed their trip, Gary pushing as he always did. After a quick pit stop in Albuquerque, they continued to Santa Fe. It was just 10:30 am when Gary took the 282a exit in Santa Fe.

“God partner,” Ron announced, “Find a gas station or restaurant quick, my eyeballs are floating!”



“Anyone have any objection to fast food?” Gary rejoined, “There’s a McDonald’s right here.”

“Any port in a storm,” Ron groaned.

Having taken care of their immediate needs and having eaten McDonald’s typical cardboard tasting lunch, they stopped to fill up. After they filled the tank, Ron looked at Gary and asked, “Do you have any problem driving on into Pueblo, my friend? You make better time driving than anyone I know; even if my eyeballs end up floating.”

“Nope,” Gary replied, “Next stop Pueblo. We’ll be there at 2:15 pm, give or take.”

Clarence and Ron just shook their heads. If Gary said 2:15 pm, you could probably make book on it.

“Here you go gents,” Gary announced as he exited I-25, “Pueblo, CO!”

“What time is it?” Ron asked.

“2:12 pm!” Gary announced, grinning from ear to ear.

“Well, pull into that gas station over there and I’ll get directions to the real estate office,” Ron directed.

“May I help you?” the receptionist said, looking up.

“Hi, my name is Ron Green, is John Jacobs in?”

“Sure, just a minute, I get him for you,” she said.

“John, there’s a Ron Green and two other fellows waiting to see you,” she announced.

“Good!” he replied, “They’re early. I didn’t really expect them until tomorrow morning.”

He rose and made his way to the front desk. “Mr. Green?” He inquired, “I’m John Jacobs. My, you folks certainly made good time.”

“John, this is Gary Olsen and this fine gentleman here is Clarence Rawlings.” Ron offered, taking his hand.

“It’s certainly nice to meet all of you,” John said, “Let’s step into my office.”

After getting everyone seated, John continued. “How was your trip?” he inquired, not wanting to rush things.

“Fast,” Ron stated, “I made the mistake of letting Gary drive most of the way. Now, Gary doesn’t speed, you understand, but neither does Gary slow down nor stop for anything. John, we’d like to see the farm this afternoon, if that’s possible, but first, I’m sure we would all appreciate it if you told us a bit more about the property.”

“Ron,” John began, “the property is located just outside of Beulah, southwest of here. In fact, it’s fairly close to the San Isabel National Forest. It’s one of the few flat pieces of land in the area. There is a spring fed creek running across the back of the property, near the base of the foothills that separate it from the National Forest.

“Access is by gravel road, as you’ll see. As I told Kathy, the land hasn’t been farmed in a couple of years. There were buildings on the property, but they burned last year, vandals, we suspect. There is a farm on either side of the property, although,” he added, “they aren’t nearly as flat as this parcel.”

John,” Ron asked, “Not to be nosey, but we sort of had the impression that the owner was anxious to sell. What, if anything, can you tell us about that?”

“Ron,” John replied, “I can’t really get into that too much, but I can tell you that the gentleman has a terminal illness and neither of his children are interested in farming. Why do you ask?”

“No particular reason,” Ron replied, “Just curious. And, he seemed quick to accept our counter offer.”

“To be honest with you folks,” John chuckled, “He only wanted \$330,000 for the parcel. I suggested that he ask for \$350,000 to give him some bargaining room. What about the financing? Have you folks made any progress with that?”

“You might be surprised John,” was all that Ron said, “You might be surprised.”

“There is a lot of snow down there,” John offered, “This isn’t exactly the best time of the year to be venturing forth.”

“I have a 4-wheel drive John,” Ron explained, “Will that do?”

“Sure Ron,” John replied, “Shall we get on with it?”

They got in their vehicles, John had a Cherokee, and Ron drove, following John closely. Half an hour later, they pulled up to a gate on a turnoff from a gravel road. They all got out and stood around while John unlocked the gate. After unlocking and opening the gate, John turned to the assembled trio.

“The land we’ve been passing through for the last three quarters of a mile is the parcel. You can see the south fence line over there,” he said, pointing to the south. “I had the road to the old homestead plowed out in anticipation of your visit,” he went on, “I’m sure

glad it hasn't snowed since. Well gents, why don't you all hop in the Cherokee and we'll look around; there's no sense in taking two vehicles."

Ron got in front with John and Gary and Clarence piled into the back. A short while later, they came to a stop next to a set of burned out buildings.

"It's like I told you back in the office," John said, "The buildings all burned. It had to be vandals, I could see one building burning, but four seems unlikely."

"I see that there's a windmill," Ron said, "Is that how the owner got his water?"

"Yes," John replied. "You'll notice that the blades need some work, but up to two years ago, that oversized fan pulled all the water you'd ever need from the 6" well."

"How's the water?" Ron asked.

"Harder than a brick," John answered, "Most of the water here in Colorado is harder than a brick. You guys are really fortunate, you know," he went on, "Water rights are hard to come by in this area."

"Can we see the creek?" Ron asked.

If you want to wade the snow, it's fine by me," John replied, "You'll forgive me if I don't join you."

Clarence and Ron slugged through the snow and Gary remained behind.

"Well, that answers one question," Ron announced when they finally arrived at the creek.

"Yeah," Clarence said, "Would you look at all of that rock...?"

## Chapter Ten – Pueblo

*Back in the John's office in Pueblo...*

"Well, gentlemen," what did you think of the property?" John asked.

"John," Ron responded, "It's everything we expected and more!"

"Good, good," John replied, smiling. "I don't want to seem pushy, but it would appear that the next logical question would be are you folks prepared to demonstrate financing? Your option is only for 90 days and is subject to your being able to demonstrate that you can pay for the property or have arranged financing."

"John?" Clarence asked, "Is there a phone I could use? I'll use my phone card, its long distance."

"Certainly Clarence, you can use the phone in the conference room. And, don't worry about the phone card, just dial your number."

"Thanks," Clarence said, rising, "Do you have a business card for the Escrow Company you plan to use?"

"Sure?" John responded, somewhat taken aback.

Clarence took the card and walked down the hall to the conference room he noticed when they came in. He dialed his number and waited while the phone rang.

"Hello?" Lucy came on the line.

"Lucy, it's me!" he announced, happy to hear her voice. "I need to ask you something."

"Oh okay, what do you need to know dear?" she asked.

Clarence hadn't told anyone other than Lucy about taking the loan from his retirement. "Lucy, if it's okay with you, I'm going to write the check for \$150,000 that we talked about."

"Well, if you are absolutely, positively sure of this, go ahead," she replied.

"Lucy, I think that it's something we've got to do," he answered. "I brought the extra checkbook, so I'm going to write the check right now."

"Whatever you think Clarence, I love you," Lucy responded.

"I'll call you this evening," he said, "I love you too."

Clarence returned to the office. He looked at John and said, pulling out his checkbook, "John, I'm going to give you a check for \$150,000, made out to the escrow company, right now; is that okay with you?"

"Uh...well...uh...sure Clarence," John stammered.

"And," Gary offered, "You'll have the remaining \$180,000 early next week."

"I don't know what to say gentlemen," John gushed. "I didn't expect...I mean, well you know, these things usually take a while."

"You will, of course," Ron intoned, "Ensure that our realtor receives her commission, right?"

"No problem gentlemen," John smiled, "She'll have her check the day after escrow closes!"

They rose and shook hands with the startled realtor. Saying their goodbyes, they filed out and got into the Pathfinder. John picked up Clarence's check and just stood shaking his head in disbelief.

"Well, guys, dinner's on me," Ron announced.

"Did you see the look on his face when Clarence handed him the check?" Gary asked.

"I thought he was going to crap his pants," Clarence laughed.

"Watch it Clarence," Ron warned, "You don't want Lucy mad at you for cussing!"

After a really fine meal at what was reported to be the best steak house in Pueblo, the men checked into a Holiday Inn; each getting his own room.

"Lucy, it's me, Clarence," Clarence announced.

"Hi dear," she replied, "Did everything go okay?"

"Better than okay Lucy," he returned, "The property will be paid for by early next week. As soon as I get back, we'll list our property."

"I just hope that this works out like you expect," was all she could say.

"It will be ok Lucy," he assured her. "What's the worst that could happen? We'd end up owning \$150,000 worth of a \$330,000 property in Colorado. I'm tired, I had a big meal and I need to get some sleep. We will be leaving in the morning for Iowa. You know, if Gary drives, we will probably be there by tomorrow night!"

“Well you be careful Clarence,” she said.

“Hello?”

Linda, it’s me,” Ron said.

“Hi honey,” she said, “How did it go today?”

“Lyn,” he replied, “The property is beyond my wildest expectations. It even has a spring fed creek. And Lyn, Clarence and I walked back and looked at the creek, it’s full of rock.”

“Why is that important?” she asked.

“We are going to build our homes using stone and we weren’t sure where we’d get the stone,” he replied.

“That’s nice dear,” she said, not realizing the importance of his discovery.

“I’m going to hit the sack,” he said, “I’ll call you when we get to Iowa.”

“Good night honey,” she said.

“Good night dear,” he responded, hanging up the phone.

“Sharon?” Gary asked.

“How did it go today?” she asked.

“The farm is great,” he gushed, “And, Clarence laid a check for \$150,000 on the realtor. While Ron and Clarence walked down to check out the creek, I took a bunch of pictures.”

“Creek?” she asked, “Nobody said anything about a creek that I can remember.”

“It turns out,” he said, “That this place is more than we expected it to be. For one thing, it butts up against the San Isabel National Forest; for another, there is lots of water; and, well, it’s about as perfect a section of land as one could imagine for *The Ark*.”

“Are you leaving for Iowa in the morning,” she asked.

“We sure are Sharon,” he replied, “And, if I can get Ron to let me drive, we’ll be in Des Moines by dark.”

“Don’t push it Gary,” Sharon urged, “It’s over 800 miles from Denver to Des Moines and you’re quite a ways south of Denver.”

"I won't," he assured her. "Guess I'd better get some sleep, it's going to be a long day tomorrow, no matter what. Goodnight."

"Goodnight dear," she said and hung up.

About 5am the next morning...

Gary knocked on Ron's door. Ron opened it and motioned him in.

"Aren't you ready to go?" Gary asked.

"I'll be ready in 15 minutes," Ron replied, "Get out of here and let me get a quick shower."

"Ok, see you in the lobby in 15 minutes," Gary said, "And, shake a leg, I want to eat and get on the road."

"Yeah...yeah...yeah," Ron said as he slammed the door in Gary's face.

"Gee, I guess he's not a morning person," Gary thought as he headed for the lobby.

Entering the lobby, Gary was surprised to see Clarence sitting in an overstuffed chair, a cup of coffee in one hand and a newspaper in the other.

"Hi Gary," Clarence said cheerfully, "Where's Ron?"

"Clarence," Gary replied chuckling, "Somehow I don't think that Ron is what you'd call a morning person. Where's the coffee pot?"

Clarence pointed towards a large urn next to registration counter. Gary walked over, got a cup and returned to sit next to Clarence.

"Anything new in the paper this morning?" he asked, looking at Clarence.

"You know Gary," he replied, "I'm starting to get worried. Just last week they found Ricin in the Senate building and they cancelled another bunch of flights from Europe. They're killing off our boys' right and left in Iraq, over 40 in the last week alone. According to the paper this morning, the Israelis attacked several relocation camps in the West bank with helicopter gunships. Worse, North Korea and Iran are now balking at letting the inspectors in after everything was agreed."

"What do you think it all means?" Gary asked.

"Gary, if anything, we may be a day late and a dollar short getting *The Ark* established," Clarence responded.

“Morning fellas,” Ron said, falsely cheerful, “I’m starved, let’s eat.”

“Ron, I’m surprised that you’d have room for a cup of coffee after the meal you put away last night,” Gary said, shaking his head in total disbelief. “There aren’t many restaurants open this early, what say we grab a handful of those donuts over there and stop to eat down the road a ways?”

Ron groaned; Clarence smiled.

*Less than 2 hours later, south of Denver...*

“Ron, are you still hungry?” Gary snickered.

“Can’t you hear my stomach growling?” Ron retorted.

Taking the exit, Gary pulled up and parked at a likely looking restaurant. “Will this do?” he asked, turning off the ignition.

Having eaten and gotten squared away, they filled the Pathfinder’s tank at an Amoco station. Gary got behind the wheel, announcing, “I’ll drive!” They all piled in and braced themselves for another of Gary’s marathon driving sessions.

A couple of hours later, they merged from I-76 onto I-80 in western Nebraska. Gary pulled into the first rest area they came to and suggested that they stretch a bit and get the kinks out.

“Gary!” Ron snorted, “You must have a bladder the size of a gas tank!”

“Well, maybe not Ron, but it sure is bigger than a thimble!” Gary retorted.

After their pit stop, Gary scrambled to get behind the wheel.

“Where are we?” Ron asked.

“We’re a few miles west of Ogallala, Nebraska on Interstate 80,” Gary announced.

“Just where in the hell is Ogallala, Nebraska?” Ron demanded.

“Same place it’s always been!” Gary said, starting the Pathfinder.

Ron was still groaning five miles down the road; Clarence was still chuckling and shaking his head. “I’m frankly surprised,” he thought, “That those two boys haven’t killed one another by now.”

*They reached Omaha just at suppertime...*



“Ron, my friend, I’d prefer to push on through to Des Moines,” Gary stated, “But in light of your delicate condition, let’s stop here for the night.” He continued and pulled into a Best Western motel.

“What do you mean?” Ron asked, “By my ‘delicate condition’?”

“Why your perpetual hunger, of course,” Gary laughed. “My friend, you are in for a real treat. Omaha has some of the best steakhouses in the country.”

While they were checking in, Gary learned that there really wasn’t any such thing as the “best” steakhouse in Omaha. The clerk named a half dozen places within easy walking distance that were, “Out of this world.”

“Why don’t we all meet here in the lobby in 30 minutes?” Gary suggested.

“Fine by me.”

“Me, too.”

*30 minutes later in the lobby...*

“Ron, you pick the place and I’ll buy!” Gary announced.

“Where do you suggest that I look?” Ron asked.

“Out the door!” Gary smirked.

“That smart mouth is going to get you killed someday!” Ron roared.

An hour and one half later, they were back in the lobby of the Best Western.

“Ron, I don’t know how you do it,” Clarence said.

“Do what?” Ron asked.

“You ate a 28oz T-bone steak and wanted dessert. Gary had trouble finishing his 12oz Sirloin. You got a hollow leg or something?” Clarence replied.

“I noticed that you had dessert with me Clarence,” Ron retorted.

“Yeah man, I did,” Clarence said, “But I only had a 12oz Ribeye steak!”

“Look guys, let’s sleep in,” Gary suggested. “We can meet here in the lobby around 7 am, have a leisurely breakfast and hit the road. We’ll be in Des Moines before noon. Since tomorrow is Saturday, there probably won’t be any really heavy traffic.”

"It's fine by me," Clarence said.

"Somehow 'sleeping in' and '7 am' are incongruous," Ron muttered, "But ok, slave driver, see you at 7 am.

*At the restaurant the next morning...*

"My God, Ron," Clarence exclaimed, "I still don't know how you do it!"

"Why whatever do you mean Clarence?" Ron asked innocently.

"You ate enough food last night to feed 2 or 3 people." Clarence continued, "And now you have 3 eggs, bacon, pancakes, sausage, biscuits and gravy."

"I'm just a growing boy, Clarence," Ron smiled.

"Yes, OUT!" was Clarence's response.

A little over three hours later, they were on I-35 on the north side of Des Moines.

"Derek's place is about 20 miles up the road," Gary announced.

"Great!" Ron replied. "Clarence, you and I are going to drive back to California, even if we have to handcuff Gary."

A half hour later, they pulled into the driveway of a split foyer home in a town so small that you'd miss it if you blinked.

"Dad!" Derek came rushing out.

## Chapter Eleven – Iowa

Gary bolted from the car, embracing his son.

“That boy sure is a lot taller than his dad,” Clarence commented, “Sharon’s not his mom is she?”

“No, Gary’s first wife was named Joyce. Gary said she was only about 4’10” tall,” Ron replied, “I have no idea how they ended up with a kid that tall.”

Gary waived to Ron and Clarence to disembark. “Derek, I’d like you to meet two friends of mine, Ron and Clarence.” Gary said.

“Dad, I met Ron ten years ago, don’t you remember?” Derek said, extending his hand to Ron. He turned to Clarence and extended his hand, “It’s nice to meet you, Sir.”

Clarence grinned, “I’ll say one thing Gary, you sure taught them manners.”

“Yeah right,” Gary thought, “Clarence hasn’t met Damon yet.”

“Come on in Dad,” there are two people just dying to meet you.” Derek said.

They entered the house. Mary was standing at the top of the foyer stairs holding Joshua, their new son. “Hi Gary,” she said.

“Hi Mary,” he returned, “This must be Joshua. Here let me hold him.” He extended his arms taking his new grandson in his arms. He turned and sat in a comfortable looking, but worn chair.

Looking up, he noticed his 3-year old granddaughter, Elizabeth, whom he had only seen once when she was Joshua’s age. “Come here, Little Bit,” he said, “There’s plenty of room on my lap for everyone.”

Elizabeth shyly walked to her grandfather. “Are you really my andpa?” she asked.

“I sure am Little Bit. We’ve talked on the phone, doesn’t my voice sound familiar?” he asked.

She slid up on her andpa’s knee.

“Dad, there’s someone else here who would like to meet you, too!” Derek advised. Just then, a boy about age 10 sauntered in from the kitchen.

“Hi, Grandpa, I’m...” the boy started to say.

“DJ!” his grandfather shouted. “Come here, it’s about time that I met you.”

Derek motioned for Ron and Clarence to join him in the kitchen. "When I got back from Korea," he started, "Jolene met me with DJ in one hand and divorce papers in the other. DJ has been living with Jolene's folks ever since. Dad gets to Iowa so seldom that he's just never gotten to meet any of my children."

"My, my," Clarence said, shaking his head.

"Would you look at the grin on Gary's face," Ron said. "I think that that is the biggest smile I've ever seen."

"Dad, Joshua needs to take a nap," Derek offered, "Let Mary take him and put him down. Lunch is ready," he said looking around, "Is anyone hungry?"

"I could eat a horse!" Ron replied.

Clarence just shook his head.

"Come on Elizabeth and DJ," Gary said, "Let's have lunch."

They mostly made small talk during lunch, Gary warming to his grandchildren. Finally, Derek stood, "Time for your nap Little Bit. Come on, your andpa will be here when you wake up." Taking his daughter by her hand, Derek said, "Give andpa a kiss."

Elizabeth rushed to her grandfather and planted a large, wet kiss on this cheek. "See you later, andpa," she said.

Derek returned and sat down. "Sharon said something about you buying a piece of property in Colorado; how did that happen and how has everything turned out?"

"Derek, you wouldn't believe the luck we've had," Gary responded. "Clarence came up with a major portion of the purchase price and the bank in Charles City is going to loan us the balance. We're on our way up there to sign the loan papers Monday morning."

"Tell me about the property," Derek said.

For the next hour, the men explained in the greatest detail possible about the property, their idea of an intentional community and the preparations that they'd made in the short time since they began discussing the idea.

"Gee Dad," Derek said, "This is great. I sure wish we could join you."

"Why can't you Derek?" Gary asked.

"Dad, I have to have an income. I have to pay support for DJ and I plainly have responsibilities." Derek explained.

“That’s true, Derek,” Gary said, “Wouldn’t want it any other way. However, I want you to know that you and Mary have someplace to come in case the crap hits the fan.”

“Personally, I can only see one mistake that you’ve made so far,” Derek said looking around the table.

“What might that be?” Gary asked.

You know my opinion of main battle rifles Dad,” Derek replied, “I would have purchased FAL’s.”

“Son, I’m sure that we would have considered the SA-58’s manufactured by DSA if we could have, but it just wasn’t reasonable under the circumstances.”

“What do you mean?” Derek asked.

“Well,” Gary began, “The standard SA-58 is illegal in California. You can get a version with a pistol grip, but it has a 10-round fixed magazine. Hell, who wants half a gun? We could get the M1A’s right now. Say, while we’re on the subject, did you get those magazines?”

“Yep, UPS delivered them yesterday,” Derek said. “Why did you want so many?”

“We have 5 M1A’s,” Gary replied. “This will give us each seven magazines and leave five in reserve. Say, Derek, is there anyone around here that sells 30-round magazines for the Mini-14?”

“Sure Dad, how many do you need?” Derek asked.

“40,” Gary answered.

“40?” Derek repeated, “Why so many?”

“Derek, how many magazines do you carry for your M-16?” Gary asked.

“7,” he responded.

“And, 7 times 5 is...” Gary continued.

“35. Sorry, wasn’t thinking,” Derek replied.

“In fact, Derek why don’t you pick up 42, if you can?” Gary suggested.

“That’s a lot of money Dad,” Derek responded, “Oh by the way, I owe you a small refund of the money you sent.”

“Keep it Derek,” Gary said, “How much will those magazines cost?”

“Let’s see, 42 times \$40 plus tax comes to about \$1,800, Dad” Derek calculated, “That’s a lot of money.”

“Here Derek,” Ron said reaching for his wallet, “Your Dad paid for the M1A magazines, let me give you the money for the Mini-14 magazines.” Ron promptly counted out \$2,500.

“Ron, you gave me too much money!” Derek exclaimed.

“Nope, while you’re at it, pick up as many 13 round Browning Hi-Power magazines as you have money for, ok?”

“Derek, I just have one question,” Ron said.

“Yes?” Derek responded.

“Is there any chance that you could go right now?”

“Uh, sure, I guess so,” Derek replied. “Would you guys like to ride along?”

“Hell no,” Ron answered, “We’ll drive!”

An hour later, they were at the gun shop Derek frequented in Des Moines...

“Jack, I’d like you to meet my father, Gary and his two friends, Ron and Clarence. Dad had some business here in Iowa and he stopped by for a visit.”

After introductions were made all around, they got down to business. “Jack,” Derek asked, “How many 30-round PMI magazines do you have on hand for a Mini-14?”

“More than you want!” Jack replied, “How many do you need?”

“42,” Derek said try to be nonchalant, “Do you have that many?”

“Gee Derek, I’m not sure, let me check my stock.” Jack responded shaking his head.

“Derek, come here a minute,” Ron said, pulling Derek aside. “On the way down, I was calculating. Depending upon how much he wants for the 13 round Browning magazines, we could use 20. And, if he has any government surplus 1911 magazines, we need a dozen.”

“Derek, you’re in luck, I have 45 of the 30-round Mini-14 mags.”

“Great, Jack, do you have any 13 round Browning Hi power mags?”

“You mean pre-ban, of course,” Jack replied.

“Yes, I do, how much are they?” Derek asked.

“The pre-ban Hi-Power mags I have in stock are Italian and they are \$20 each.”

“Ok,” Derek nodded, “Do you have any government surplus 1911 mags?”

“I’m almost afraid to say more than you want,” Jack smiled, “How many do you want?”

“A dozen, and I’ll take 20 of the Browning mags and all 45 of the 30-round PMI mags.” Derek said.

A few minutes later...

“Ok Derek, that comes to \$2,294.75 plus tax for a total of \$2,432.44. Will that be cash or charge?” Jack asked.

“Cash,” Derek replied.

“Why the hell didn’t you say so in the first place?” Jack asked. “Now I have to recalculate everything. I give a 10% discount on every cash purchase over \$2,000,” Jack said. “Let’s see, the new total is...\$2,189.19.”

“Here you go,” Derek said, peeling off 22 of Ron’s 100-dollar bills from the roll.

“Say Jack, what kind of rifle is that one with the pistol grip?” Clarence asked.

“You mean this one?” Jack asked, pointing to the FAL.

“Yeah that one, what is it?” Clarence asked.

“It’s a DSA, SA-58 Congo... .308 caliber, 10 round or 20 round detachable box magazine, Clarence. I assume that you’re from California, I can’t sell it to you.”

“No you misunderstand,” Clarence, said, “We were talking after lunch and Derek said how much he wanted a SA-58. I just bought a M1A and I will be picking it up when I get home. How much is it?”

“Derek, is that true?” Jack asked.

“I mentioned how much I wanted one that’s true enough,” Derek, said, “But Clarence, I couldn’t accept a gift like that.”

“Just you hush boy,” Clarence retorted. “Jack, you didn’t say how much the weapon was, what is the price? And Jack, do you have the twenty round magazines in stock?”

“The price of the rifle is \$1,695 Clarence and yes, I have 20-round magazines, in fact, I have both new and used. The used are \$5 each and the new magazines are \$12.”

“Ok. Is that a Mini-14 over there?” Clarence continued.

“Uh, huh,” Jack replied.

“How much is it?” Clarence asked.

“Clarence, the MSRP on that firearm is \$655, but as it happens, I have them on sale for \$523.99.”

Here you go boy,” Clarence said, handing Derek \$1,900. “You buy yourself that there SA-58 and the Mini-14. And get 7 new magazines, too while you’re at it. You have 300 dollars left, as I recall and this should be just about enough to pay for that stuff.”

“I don’t know what to say Clarence,” Derek stammered.

“Just say thanks boy and buy those guns.” Clarence retorted.

“Thanks! Jack, I’ll have the SA-58 and the Mini-14, if you please. Oh, and 7 new 20-round magazines.”

“God, you boys from California must be made of money,” Jack said, shaking his head yet another time. “Ok Derek, fill out these forms while I ring this up.”

“Derek, that will be 2,197.05,” Jack announced.

Derek sheepishly handed Jack all of his cash, \$2,200.

“There you go Derek, \$2.95 is your change. Don’t spend it all in one place,” Jack laughed. “You can pick up your weapons on Friday.

They gathered up the bags of magazines and walked back to the truck. Derek had tears streaming down his cheeks. If he had looked, he would have noticed that his Dad did, too.



## Chapter Twelve – The Adoption

The trip back to Huxley started out quietly. Derek and Gary were sitting in the front; Ron and Clarence sat in the back. After about ten miles, Gary couldn't handle the silence any more.

"Clarence I just don't know how to thank you..." Gary began.

"Gary," Clarence replied joyfully, "The looks on Derek's face and your face is thanks enough. It just purely makes this old heart feel good to be able to help a young person. Especially a fine young man like Derek!"

"Mr. Rawlings...Clarence?" Derek stammered, "Thank you so very much. Mr. Green...Ron, you too; I thought that I'd never be able to save up enough money to buy an FAL. And a Mini-14 on top of it; Wow!!"

"Derek," his dad began, "I've been thinking. I'll leave you a little extra and you can pick up 20 of those used FAL mags. Do you have a .22 caliber rifle or a shotgun or any handguns?"

"Dad," Derek replied, "I've got your single shot .22 and the old single shot 20-gauge of your grandpa's that you gave me, that's all."

"Derek," Ron said, "I'd give anything if ALL of my kids had turned out as fine as you. I've got a daughter I haven't seen since she was a baby in her mother's arms. My son Scott is sitting in prison for armed robbery. My daughter Paula is a fine young lady. She got married a couple of years ago and moved to Minnesota. My mother moved to Minnesota with Paula and her husband. My daughter Jennifer...well she's ok, I guess. She lives in Oklahoma with her husband and runs a day care.

"My three stepchildren are something else. Not to complain, mind you. John lives with us, has a job as a security guard for one of the studios; his current assignment is JAG. Brenda just remarried; her new husband seems like a nice enough fellow but she's had her problems. And then, there's Kevin! He's a diabetic, you know, and he's well on his way to becoming a drunk. That's a combination that just doesn't mix. He's been arrested a half-dozen times for anything ranging from public drunkenness to carrying a concealed weapon. If he doesn't get his act together...well, let's just say he worries me."

"Ron!" Clarence exclaimed, "I didn't know that you had problems like that!"

"Wasn't anyone's business Clarence," Ron rejoined softly, "That's life."

They arrived back at Derek's home in Huxley.

As they entered the house, Mary called, "Supper's ready!"

Elizabeth ran to her andpa. "Andpa, andpa," she jabbered excitedly, "When I woke up you were gone!"

"Your daddy and my friends and I had to run an errand," Gary replied, picking his granddaughter up. "You know, Little Bit, that your andpa and your andma are moving soon and we will be able to come visit a lot more."

Elizabeth's eyes got as big as saucers. "You mean I've got anutter andma, too?"

Everyone just chuckled. During dinner, Derek excitedly related the afternoon's events to Mary. Mary was dumbfounded.

"DJ?" Gary said, "Your dad tells me that you are quite the tractor driver."

Gary had finally broken the barrier, which seemed to exist between his grandson and him. For the remainder of dinner, and well past, DJ (short for Derek, Jr.) related to everyone how his Grandfather (maternal) had gotten him involved in tractor pulling contest at a very young age. It became apparent that the boy was quite successful.

Mary had cleared the dishes and loaded the dishwasher. She rejoined the group at the table.

"Derek," Gary enjoined, "The fellas might be interested in knowing how you and Mary met."

"You know Dad," Derek responded, "We met in the Army."

"Sure Derek," Gary urged, "I know the whole story, but Ron and Clarence don't and they might find it interesting to learn what Mary DID in the Army"

"Dad..." Derek complained, but continued "You all know that I'm on an Abrams tank, right? Anyway, I met Mary one day when they were loading my tank aboard a transporter. She was the driver."

"Forgive my ignorance," Ron said, "But what's a transporter?"

"It's a lowboy tractor-trailer rig," Mary responded.

"You mean you're a...semi driver?" Ron asked incredulously.

"Yep," she replied.

"But you haven't done it since the Army right?" Clarence asked.

"Well that's not exactly true." She responded, "I was driving a tractor trailer rig through my third month with Joshua."

Gary could visualize the wheels turning in his friends' heads.

"I hate to be a party pooper guys," Gary said, "But it's getting late. I think that we should head up to Ames and get a motel."

"Dad!" Derek exploded, "You can stay here!"

"Son, thanks for the offer," Gary replied, "But, you already have a house full and we tired old men need our own bed and some quiet for a few hours."

"What do you mean OLD?" Ron and Clarence chorused.

They made their goodbyes and drove a few miles north to Ames. There was a Holiday Inn near downtown and they pulled in and registered.

"I remember a story about this place," Gary offered, "Let's get a night cap and I'll tell you about it."

They entered the small bar and ordered drinks. "When I was going to college here back in 1965," Gary said, "Peter, Paul, and Mary were booked to do a concert out at the college and were staying in this very inn. Anyway, and guys it's been 40 years so don't hold me to this, it seems that one of the guys either got drunk or took some dope, who knows. Mary checked on him the next morning and there he lay, half in, half out of bed. Had to call an ambulance and everything. It was quite a buzz on the campus for a couple of days and then died out. Hell, I don't really know if the story is even true."

"Gary?" Clarence "Are we going to meet your other son?"

"Derek mentioned," Gary, responded, "That Damon's kids were down for the weekend. So, I expect that we will get to meet them tomorrow."

"What I want to know," Ron injected, "Is whether or not you got to see Peter, Paul and Mary in concert?"

"Nope," Gary replied, "And you know, I can't even remember why not!"

Their drinks finished, the men trudged off to bed, each consumed with his thoughts.

*About 8 am, the next morning at the Holiday Inn...*

When Gary walked into the lobby, Ron and Clarence were huddled around a table in the free breakfast area.

"Hi guys," he said, "What's up?"

‘When are you planning to go to Derek’s?’ Clarence asked.

‘I called him and told him to go ahead and go to church,’ Gary responded, ‘Why?’

‘Well partner,’ Ron answered, ‘You’ve told us a bit about your other son, Damon. Is he really as flaky as you indicated? Bear with me here partner, there is a point to my question.’

‘To an extent, yes,’ Gary responded, ‘Why?’

‘Clarence and I have been visiting,’ Ron continued. ‘Your son Derek doesn’t have a basic arsenal yet, despite what we did for him yesterday. Does Damon have any firearms?’

‘No, thank heaven,’ Gary replied, ‘He is pretty self-aware and doesn’t think that he should keep guns around.’

‘Gary,’ Clarence added, ‘Like Ron said, we’ve been talking it over. When we get back home, we think that the group should discuss our bringing our families into the fold. Where you are concerned, that would mean your two sons and your two daughters and their families.’

‘If the group is agreeable, we could each decide who, within our family group, might be an eligible candidate. In other words, we would pre-screen our own family members. Then, on a case by case basis, presuming the group approved, we could approach those family members that we thought were appropriate to the group and invite them to participate.’

‘I like that idea fellas,’ Gary said, ‘When we get home, let’s do it.’

‘Let’s get some breakfast, I’m starving,’ Ron said.

‘And when aren’t you?’ Gary asked.

The men continued their conversation over breakfast.

‘Gary,’ Clarence picked up the conversation, ‘I don’t feel right about leaving Derek half armed and Damon unarmed. I spoke to Lucy last night and with your permission, she and I would like to sort of adopt your two boys.’

‘Now wait a minute Clarence,’ Gary rejoined, ‘If you are taking this where I think you are...’

‘Shut and listen Gary!’ Ron cut in sharply.

‘I don’t know if you were paying any attention at all Gary,’ Clarence went on, ‘But Jack

is open from noon to 4 pm on Sunday.”

“I don’t know about you guys...” was all that Gary could manage.

“After breakfast, why don’t you drive us around town Gary,” Ron suggested, “Let’s find out why you think Iowa is such a great place.”

As they drove around Ames, Gary marveled at how much the town had changed since the seventies when he was last in the area. He pointed out the restaurant where he had met his first wife, the apartment building that he had lived in and helped manage for a brief period and other sites of interest.

Ron and Clarence couldn’t get over how clean the town seemed by comparison to some of the communities that they were familiar with in California. As they wearied from their jaunt, it was decided that they would go back to the Holiday Inn restaurant and get some coffee.

“Clarence, I still don’t know that I’m comfortable with what you’re planning to do,” Gary said as their coffee was served.

“Gary,” Clarence replied, “You don’t think that Fred and Jan had all that money to buy their arsenal do you?”

“I hadn’t thought about it Clarence, I had just assumed...” Gary came back.

“You know that Fred is my sisters son,” Clarence went on, “Even though he is a paramedic with LA County, he doesn’t have a lot in savings. He and Jan have put all of their extra money into paying off their home. So, you see, I already have quite a bit invested in weapons,” he laughed. “And, that’s how I choose to think of it, Gary, as an investment. You never know, there might come the day that your son and his FAL could save my butt.”

“Anyway, I figure our home will clear about \$300,000, maybe a little more,” Clarence, continued. “Since I’ve already put up \$150,000, I only have to invest half of the proceeds from the sale of my home into the project. I’ll use the remainder to repay my retirement account.”

“You know Clarence, now that you bring up that retirement account,” Gary said, “I’ve a thought or two I like to mention. Assume that you repay the loan on your retirement account and the SHTF. Do you think the institution will still be there to make your payments? Do you think that there will be a bank to accept those payments? Do you think there will even be a government to ensure that all goes as you’ve planned? I’m not sure that I have a GOOD answer to those questions, Clarence,” Gary continued, “But if I had the amount of cash that you do, I would be thinking about an alternative form of investment.”

“Like what?” Clarence asked.

Precious metals,” Gary and Ron replied, in unison and then laughed that they both had the same idea.

“The price of Gold is slightly over \$400 an ounce at the moment,” Gary stated. “In fact, it’s been dropping for the past week or so. But over the long run, gold has increased tremendously. Silver is a fair investment, too. And, coins minted before 1965 have a high percentage of silver. In *Lights Out*, the author speculated that pre-1965 coins would be worth many times their face value in a SHTF scenario.”

“I’ll talk to Lucy about it when we get home,” Clarence murmured.

“Clarence?” Ron asked, “Tell me something. Do you ask Lucy about everything you do?”

“I have for the past 20 years or more,” Clarence smiled, “Back in my younger, wilder days, I didn’t. But, over the past twenty or so odd years I have. I guess that’s why we’ve been married for 35 years. Why do you ask?”

“I didn’t mean anything by it Clarence,” Ron said, “I was more making a point to our wander-lusting friend here,” nodding his head toward Gary. “Lyn and I’ve been married almost 25 years. The past dozen or so, since I pulled my head out and participated in the family, have been great years. My partner here only has had his head pulled out for a couple three years. Just making a point.”

“That two timing, gold digging broad,” Gary said aloud referring to Kathy.

“Partner, I tried to tell you but you wouldn’t listen,” Ron said. “Did it ever once occur to you while you were so ‘in love’ with Kathy that she was two timing Paul and that she’d do the same to you the first chance she got?”

“Not once,” Gary admitted. “If I had just listened to you...”

“Gary?” Ron asked, “How do you think I recognized Kathy for what she was. Been there...done that! Hey, what’s say we head out to Derek’s, I’m getting hungry and that Mary is some cook!”

## Chapter Thirteen – Clarence’s Kids

They arrived at Derek’s a little before noon...

“Hi son,” Gary said to Derek, who answered the door. “I thought that Damon and the kids were going to be here?”

“They are on their way Dad,” Derek responded. “You know how Damon likes to poke around.”

They all took a seat in the living room, Elizabeth running to her grandfather, “Andpa, andpa!”

“Hi Bit,” Gary responded, “Where are your brothers?”

“I got this dollie for my birthday and I...” Elizabeth yammered.

As Elizabeth explained the facts of life related to her universe to her andpa, the doorbell rang. Giving Elizabeth a kiss on the cheek, Gary set her and her ensemble in the chair and went to greet his older son.

“Damon,” Gary half shouted, embracing his older son “It’s good to see you. My, you’ve grown Britney you’re a young lady now. Aaron, how’s my pal? And Erik, the last time I saw you, you were just a baby.”

The kids rushed to hug their grandfather. Everyone sat down except for Derek who left to help Mary. Gary made introductions all around, remembering that since Derek had met Ron, Damon had also. They visited for a while and got acquainted. Gary, Ron and Clarence filled Damon in on their plans with respect to *The Ark*. Damon seemed interested, but distracted. Nothing was mentioned of the plans that Clarence and Ron had made earlier that morning.

“Foods on!” Mary announced. “Britney, Aaron, Erik and DJ can fill their plates and eat at the card table. There rest of you can find a seat around the kitchen table.”

They all filed out to the kitchen and took a chair. Mary had prepared a ham, mashed potatoes, candied sweet potatoes, the ever familiar green bean casserole, a jello salad and there was even a couple of loaves of homemade bread on the table.

“There’s something familiar about those loaves of bread,” Gary thought. “Derek, how is your grandmother doing?” he asked, referring to Francis, his ex-wife’s mother.

“Oh, she’s getting along Dad,” Derek replied, obviously uncomfortable with the question.

Gary let the subject drop, thinking it better not to open any wounds. Damon and Ron both ate like they hadn’t had a good meal in years. In Damon’s case, that could be true,

Gary had never known his son to be much of a cook. After everyone had eaten his or her fill, everyone, with the exception of Derek, returned to the living room. Derek stayed in the kitchen to help Mary with the dishes.

When Mary and Derek rejoined them in the living room, Gary asked, "Mary, what's the chance you could get a baby sitter on short notice?"

"Well," she said, "I guess we could take all of the kids down to Francis' for a while, she would love to see them, why?"

"My friends Clarence and Ron have in mind a little adventure," was all that Gary would say. "Could you call Francis and see if she would watch the kids for a couple of hours?"

Mary looked to Derek for approval. He just shrugged, implying, "Don't ask me!"

"What about Joshua?" Mary asked.

"Ask Francis," Gary suggested, "If having the baby would be too much for her, he can come with us."

Mary excused herself and went to the kitchen to call Francis.

Derek went over to his Dad and asked, "What's going on?"

Gary said, "I can't tell you just yet, son. But, there's something else I wanted to talk to you about, let's go outside and have a cigarette."

Outside, after they'd it up, Gary said, "Nice feed you put on there."

"Thanks Dad," Derek blushed.

"Thing is Derek," Gary continued, "I know your financial situation better than you realize. Take this," he said, handing Derek a folded up bunch of bills.

"Dad, I can't take any money!" Derek protested.

"Son, I'm going to do the same for Damon," Gary retorted, "As besides, I SAID that I was going to give you a little money to buy some used FAL mags. I want you to use some of the money to prepare Bug Out Bags for your family before you leave for training. And, pick up a couple cases of MRE's while you're at it. There is just enough there to cover everything and leave you a little spending money to use as you and Mary see fit."

"I love you Dad," Derek said embracing his father.

They returned to the house. Mary returned from the kitchen and announced that Francis



would take all of the kids, including Joshua, but not for more than 3 hours.

“That should be enough,” Clarence announced, with Ron nodding in agreement.

Damon moved to his father’s side. “What’s going on Dad?” he asked.

Gary said, “As I told your brother, I can’t tell you just yet, son. But, there’s something else I wanted to talk to you about, let’s go outside and have a cigarette.”

Outside, Gary asked Damon, “How are you getting along?”

“Oh, I guess that I’m getting by ok dad,” Damon fairly mumbled.

“Money problems?” Gary asked.

“That, and the depression,” Damon said.

“Damon you come by the depression naturally,” Gary offered, “But, how you handle it is another matter; part of the problem is that you lack purpose; part of the problem is that you may be in a rut; and, maybe another part of the problems is being separated from your kids.”

“You know,” Damon said, “You’re more right than wrong dad, but I don’t know what to do about it.”

“Damon I have a suggestion.” Gary offered, “Why don’t you join us at *The Ark*? You’ll be farther from your kids, but you can see them just as often, I promise. As for the child support, we will work something out. Are you current on your child support or are you behind?”

“I’m a little behind,” Damon said, “But I’m getting caught up!”

“Bull crap Damon,” you’ve always been a little behind and are ‘getting caught up,’” Gary said gently.

“Dad, I…” Damon started.

“Here Damon,” Gary said handing his son a wad of folded up bills, “I gave your brother the same amount a few minutes ago. Do you know what a Bug Out Bag is?”

“I have no idea dad,” Damon mumbled, taking the money.

“Then talk to your brother,” Gary suggested. “I gave him money to put together some BOB’s and buy some MRE’s. You can just duplicate whatever he does, ok? Now,” Gary said, taking out his checkbook, “How much are you behind in your child support?”

“Dad you don’t have to do that!” Damon insisted.

“Your right Damon, I don’t” Gary replied evenly, “On the other hand I know that you have been trying very hard to get caught up. Do you remember back years ago when Derek needed braces?”

“Yes, why?” Damon asked.

“Well, Damon, I think that it’s time I brought you braces, too. Braces of a different kind; look, tell me how much you owe Mutt and how much you are obligated to her per month. I’ll make out a check right now and we’ll get you 6 months ahead. Then, you can quit that job you have at Casey’s General Store and come back to California with Ron, Clarence and me. Son, I need your help, honestly. This whole thing is coming together much faster than I anticipated.”

A slow smile began to form on Damon’s face. “Dad, I won’t be able to see the kids if I come to California!” he said.

“I’ll tell you what Damon; we will fly you back to Des Moines as often as you would normally see the kids.” Gary responded. “That’s about 6 times a year, right?”

“Right!” Damon agreed. “But, I’ll have to think about it.”

“Fair enough Damon,” Gary said, “Now, how much do I make the check out for and who do I make it payable to?”

Just as Gary handed his son the check, everyone exited the house.

“Derek?” Gary said, “Why don’t you and Mary drop the kids off and meet us at the first Ankeny exit?”

“Uh...ok Dad!” Derek replied, still puzzled.

“Damon, you ride with us!” Gary said, sliding in behind the driver’s wheel of the Pathfinder.

About 30 minutes later the two parties met up at the first Ankeny exit...Derek and Mary got in the Pathfinder and Gary pointed the vehicle toward Jack’s...

As they pulled into Jack’s parking lot, Derek exclaimed, “Dad! What’s going on here?”

“Your brother and you have been adopted,” Gary laughed.

“Huh?” both boys said in unison.

“Just watch this,” Gary continued, barely able to contain his laughter.

As they entered the store Jack exclaimed, "Well, if it isn't the rich boys from California! To what do I owe the pleasure, gentlemen?"

"You know Jack," Clarence said, "My wife and I sort of decided to sort of adopt Gary's boys. Now, sir, I have just one question for you, will you accept an out-of-state check?"

"Well...I...uh...not normally, no." Jack said, "On the other hand, if the boys are willing to wait to pick up their purchases until the check clears, I'll go along. How's that?"

"Damon, do you want a FAL or a M1A?" Clarence asked.

"Uh...uh...I guess a FAL," he said.

"What do you want for a handgun?" Clarence persisted.

"A Beretta 92 I guess." Damon mumbled, as close to speechless as he'd been in his life.

"Fine!" Clarence announced.

"Mary, do you want a FAL or a M1A?" Clarence asked, turning toward Mary.

"FAL," she replied, her mouth on the floor.

"Handgun?" Clarence asked.

"Beretta 92," she said.

"Derek, is a Beretta 92 what you want?" Clarence asked.

Derek was speechless; he nodded his head in the affirmative.

"And finally boys," Clarence said, positively beaming, "What do you want for a .22 caliber rifle?"

"10/22?" Derek mumbled.

Damon mumbled something, but no one could make it out. Gary nudged his son, "Well son, speak up, a Christmas like this only comes once in a lifetime."

"Uh 10/22," Damon spoke softly.

"Jack, did you get all of that?" Clarence asked.

Jack just stood there his mouth hanging open. "Uh...yeah, yeah, I got it," he was finally able to respond.

“One more thing, Jack,” Clarence continued, “Do you have 2 Remington 870 12-gauge combos in stock?”

“Sure do Clarence,” Jack beamed.

“Jack I wouldn’t want to disappoint you at this late date,” Clarence said barely suppressing his laughter. “But there is more! In addition to the weapons, I want 7 new 20 round magazines for each FAL; 7 pre-ban 15-round mags for each Beretta; 5 extra mags for each 10/22; a gun safe large enough to contain the entire arsenal, including what we bought yesterday; 2 cases of .308 surplus for each rifle; 2 cases of .223 for each rifle, a 1,000 rounds of 9 mil for each handgun; 10 bricks of high velocity .22 and 10 bricks of the hyper stuff; and, a case of 3” 00 buckshot for each shotgun!”

Jack, his mouth open, again, in disbelief, started passing out the yellow sheets (4473s) for each firearm purchase. And then, while Damon, Derek and Mary filled out the forms, he rang up the purchase. His mouth dropped one more time when he saw the total. Taking Clarence aside, he showed the register receipt to Clarence. Clarence smiled, took the receipt and filled out a check.

As he handed the check to Jack, he said, “Jack, that check is drawn on Wells Fargo. When we came through town, I noticed a Wells Fargo branch. Why don’t you take that check down to Wells Fargo tomorrow and cash it? That way, the boys won’t have to wait beyond the normal waiting period. Could you do that?”

“Clarence,” I bank at Wells Fargo,” was all that Jack could say.

“Well fine. Then that’s settled. The boys can pick up their weapons on Saturday, Right?”

“Right!” Jack replied.

“And Jack?” Clarence continued.

“What are the chances of you delivering the safe and ammo and such on Tuesday after the check has cleared?”

Jack turned to Derek, “What time would suit you, Derek?”

Mary responded for Derek, “I’ll be home all day, Jack. Shall we say in the morning?”

## Chapter Fourteen – Charles City

*A few minutes later, still in Jack's gun store...*

Derek was on the verge of tears, but, after yesterday, the shock was wearing off much quicker. "Jack, I'd like 40 of the used FAL mags and two cases of MRE's," he said.

Mary started to protest, but he just flashed the money his Dad had given him at her.

When Jack started to leave to get the merchandise, Damon said, "Uh Jack, I'll have the same."

"Damon, you only need 20 extra FAL mags," Gary said, "You only have one FAL, and Derek has two."

"Uh...make that 20 used FAL mags and two cases of MRE's," Damon quickly recovered.

Jack bagged their purchases, the boys settled up and they turned to leave. "You all come back REAL SOON," Jack called after them, thinking, "A five figure day...and its only Sunday. Maybe I should take the rest of the week off."

After they had placed the purchases in the back of the Pathfinder and were all aboard, Clarence asked, "Derek, do you know where there is a surplus store open today? What with all the new hardware, you folks are going to need some load bearing equipment or load bearing vests."

"Clarence you've done enough!" Derek replied. "Besides, I AM in the Guard..."

"Ok boy, calm down," Clarence replied mirthfully. "Gary, pull into that office supply store, I need to run in for a minute."

Gary pulled in to the Staples store parking lot. Clarence hopped out and said, "I'll be right back."

Five minutes later, Clarence climbed into the vehicle humming.

"What did you need, Clarence." Gary asked somewhat mystified at his friend's behavior.

"Oh nothing much," was all that Clarence would say.

Rebuffed by Clarence's response, Gary let it drop.

They drove north to the exit where Derek and Mary had left her pickup. They dropped Derek and Mary off and continued to Derek's home. They got out of the truck and entered the house; another advantage to living in small town Iowa, no need to lock the

door, most of the time. Damon went to the kitchen to make coffee. Just as he returned to the living room, Derek, Mary and the kids came in.

“Let me feed Joshua, then I’ll get some supper around,” Mary offered.

“Actually, if no one would mind, I’d like to take everyone out for pizza,” Ron said.

“You don’t have to do that, Ron,” Derek said.

“Derek, your Dad has told me time and again about the Taco pizza at Happy Joe’s,” Ron, replied, “I’ve been dying to try it for years. I saw a Happy Joe’s last night when we drove into Ames. But, I’ll be democratic about it, what say kids, how many of you want to go for pizza?”

“Yea!!!” the children responded in a single voice.

“Well, Derek, are you going to disappoint the kids?” Ron asked chuckling at putting one over on the boy he’d come to admire.

“No Sir,” Derek replied, “I know when I’m out voted!” Turning to his wife, Derek said, “Honey get a bottle and a jar of baby food and warm them, it looks like we’re eating out tonight.”

They piled into the Pathfinder and Mary’s 6 passenger Dodge pickup. Ten minutes later, they were disembarking from the vehicles at Happy Joe’s Pizza and Ice Cream Parlor. They seated themselves at a large round table and the waitress came to take their order.

“Over here,” Ron said motioning the waitress over. “Unless you hear an objection from anyone here, we’d like 3 large Taco pizzas, a pitcher of Coke and a pitcher of beer.”

“Ron isn’t that a bit much?” Gary said after the waitress had left.

“Partner, if those pizzas are half as good as you’ve been telling me,” Ron responded, “I could eat a whole one by myself!”

The waitress brought the Coke and beer. After everyone was settled with his or her drink, Clarence spoke up, “Derek?”

“Yes sir,” Derek replied.

“Tomorrow, you take your wife’s pickup when you go to work.” Clarence said handing a cash register receipt to Derek. “Stop by the Staples store and pick up the locking storage cabinet I bought for you. I figured that you would need someplace to store all of that ammo. With as much as we bought and as much as we intend to have, it simply won’t fit into the safe.”

Derek didn't know what to say; and then he remembered, "Thank you Clarence."

The waitress brought the pizzas and everyone dug in. Not surprisingly, by the time they had finished, Ron had eaten nearly a whole pizza. Even Damon seemed happier.

"Dad?" Damon said, "I want to talk over your suggestion with Britney, Aaron and Erik. If they are agreeable, I'm going to take you up on your offer."

"Great!" Gary said. "Since I didn't eat as much as my partner did, I'd like some ice cream. Would anyone else like to top off his or her pizza with some ice cream? My treat!"

Ron replied immediately, "I'll have a hot fudge Sundae!"

"Yea!!!" seemed to make clear the grandchildren's response.

They ordered ice cream all around. When they had finished, Ron and Gary settled the bill and they all headed for the cars.

"Damon," Gary said, "We will be back on Friday, and I hope you have a decision by then. I think we'll say goodnight now and save ourselves a round trip to Huxley, if that's ok with everyone."

They parted company, Derek, Damon and families headed toward Huxley, the men headed to the motel.

"What was that, 'We will be back on Friday stuff'," Ron asked. "I thought that you said that it would only take a few minutes in Charles City."

"I did say that it would only take a few minutes in Charles City Ron," Gary replied, but do you know where Charles City is?"

"The same place it's always been?" Ron asked.

Gary groaned, "Alright, I had that one coming. But that's not my point Ron; where does Paula live?"

"Minnesota," Ron replied evenly.

"Where in Minnesota?" Gary continued.

"Austin." Ron came back.

"Ron, do you know how far it is to Austin from Charles City?" Gary asked.

“No,” Ron said a smile beginning to form.

“50 miles Ron,” Gary said, “Now you wouldn’t want to be only 50 miles from your daughter and not pay her a visit would you?”

“Why Gary you sly old fox,” Clarence said, “You’ve been planning this all along, haven’t you?”

“Do you mind?” Gary inquired.

“No, of course not,” Clarence replied. “But if Ron wouldn’t mind too much, I just as soon layover in Charles City. These old bones are tired.”

“I wouldn’t mind, Clarence,” Ron bubbled. “What about you partner, you going along to visit with Paula or are you going to layover, too?”

“Ron, if you wouldn’t mind I’d like to layover, too. Besides, I have over 400 cousins in the Charles City area. I think this would be a good time to look up some of my relatives.”

“400?” they chorused.

“Yeah my mother came from a family with 11 kids; she was the next to the youngest. Anyway, the family was fruitful and multiplied. What can I say? Some of my cousins are my mother’s age.” Gary chuckled.

They pulled into the motel and went their separate ways after agreeing to meet in the lobby at 5 am.

*Lobby of the Ames Holiday Inn, 5am, Monday...*

“Morning fellas,” Gary said. “Let me settle my bill and we’ll be on our way.”

“Aren’t we going to have breakfast?” Ron asked.

“Think you can wait an hour Ron?” Gary retorted.

“Well I guess,” replied Ron, clearly disappointed.

They all piled into the Pathfinder, Gary driving, naturally. After about 40 minutes, Ron began to complain.

“Gary I’m hungry, how much farther?” he grouched.

“About ten minutes Ron,” Gary replied, “And, I am 60 years old, 5’5” tall and weigh 160 pounds. Is there anything else you’d like to know?”



“How was Kathy?” Ron said, not believing that his friend had left himself that wide open.

The remainder of the trip to the restaurant was completed in total silence. Gary pulled off at the Highway 20 exit and pulled into the restaurant on the north side of the highway. Ron was in heaven, Gary had stopped at a truck stop and everyone knows how large the portions are at a truck stop. They entered and took a booth.

After the waitress had left, Gary gave Ron the evil eye, saying, “I’ll thank you not to mention that woman again Ronald!”

“Hey lighten up Gary,” Clarence said. “He was just funning you.”

“Yeah, I’m sorry partner, but you did leave yourself wide open,” Ron said barely able to contain a chuckle.

“I suppose I am a bit sensitive so far as Kathy is concerned,” Gary admitted. “To be honest, it’s just that I feel so danged foolish.”

“You know what they say,” Clarence responded, “There’s no fool like an old fool!”

They chatted until the waitress brought their order. Ron’s order came on a platter.

“My God.” Gary declared, “What do you have there?”

“It’s called the ‘Truck Driver’s Special’,” Ron replied.

Gary turned to Clarence, “Where does he put it?”

“I don’t know, a hollow leg I suspect,” Clarence replied.

“More like a hollow head,” Gary muttered.

The men ate and resumed their trip to Charles City. As they entered Charles City about 8:30 am, Clarence remarked, “Why this is a nice little town, Gary.”

“Yep, not bad,” Ron joined.

“Welcome to Floyd County Iowa,” Gary said, “The most conservative County in Iowa.”

“Really?” Clarence asked.

“I don’t know,” Gary said, “But that’s what my dad always said.

They were early and had to wait a few minutes for the bank to open. When it did, they went in, Gary introduced everyone and they signed the papers. Matt assured them that

the Escrow Company would have the money in a couple of days. Since Gary had an account at the bank, he stopped and cashed a check.

Their business concluded, they got in the Pathfinder and Gary drove to the new motel on south Grand Avenue. Clarence and Gary unloaded their luggage and Gary showed Ron a map. He explained to Ron that Austin was on Highway 218. He then pointed toward the south, explaining to Ron that the Highway he was pointing at was 218.

“Ron,” Gary said, “Just get on 218 and head west. In about 5 miles, it will turn north. Before you know it, you’ll be in Austin.”

“I don’t know how to thank you partner,” Ron said.

“Yes you do,” Gary replied with a twinkle in his eye. “When will you be back?”

“Is early Thursday too late?” Ron asked.

“Not at all,” Gary said, turning as he waved good-bye to his friend.

## Chapter Fifteen – The Motel

Entering the motel lobby, Gary joined Clarence at the registration desk. They registered and as Clarence turned to head to his room, Gary called out, “Clarence, hold up a minute.”

“Sure Gary,” Clarence replied and dropped into a chair.

Gary finished registering and turned to Clarence. “How about we drop our things in our rooms and meet back here in a few minutes,” Gary suggested.

“Sure Gary,” Clarence said, rising, grabbing his suitcase and heading off.

A few minutes later, Clarence returned to find Gary pacing the lobby. “Hey Gary, what’s up?” he asked.

“Come on Clarence, I’ll buy you a cup of coffee,” Gary replied.

The two friends left the motel and walked across to an adjacent restaurant. They entered, took a booth and sat quietly. When the waitress had brought their coffee, Gary looked up at Clarence, took a deep breath and began.

“Clarence,” he said, “I don’t know why, but all of a sudden, I’m nervous.”

“Second thoughts Gary?” Clarence quizzed.

“No...and yes,” Gary tentatively offered. “Look my friend; you have no idea how grateful I am for what you did for Damon and Derek. I’ll say no more about it, but it has gotten me thinking. Here we are a bunch of middle-aged guys, starting to do something that we should have done 20 years ago when we had the strength, stamina, well, you know what I mean. And, there is the whole money thing. Sharon and I have struggled for years; still are in a sense. I mean, hell, here we are spending money like a bunch of drunken sailors!” He paused.

“Gary I understand what you are talking about,” Clarence responded. “Lucy and I sat down and had a long talk after this idea surfaced. She had some of the same reservations that you’ve mentioned. But, we talked it out and I am convinced that this is the right thing to do. So is she. Do you remember when I originally offered to front the \$150,000 for the property?”

“Yes I do,” Gary replied.

“If you remember,” Clarence continued, “I explained to everyone that Lucy and I had accumulated that money by being frugal. That’s a fact, Gary. Remember I said that Fred and Jan didn’t have much ready cash because they were pushing to pay their home off? I talked them into that. And, what you don’t know and what nobody in the group knows

is that Fred and Jan have been putting money away in a retirement account same as Lucy and I did.”

Clarence paused, and then continued, “Gary you pay off your home and you put money away so that come the day that you retire you don’t end up living from hand to mouth. Then, if the unexpected happens, you can weather the storm. About 20 years ago, after I quit drinking and cleaned up my act, Lucy and I started putting a fixed amount into a savings account.

“No matter what, we took the first 10% of every paycheck and put it in savings. Now, you have to understand, that was on top of the money coming out of my paycheck for retirement. Then we made an extra house payment every other month. Man, those were some lean times, I’ll tell you.”

“Clarence you sound like my father,” Gary replied numbly. “Well then you’re saying that the money you spent on the boys...”

“Came out of savings,” Clarence smiled. “What good is money if you can’t spend it? You do recall that I said that I viewed spending that money as investments don’t you?”

“Well yes,” Gary replied not getting the point.

“Gary,” Clarence continued, “You were in the Air Force a long time ago. Fred was in the Navy, but that was some time back, too. Ron, Chris and I never spent a day in the military. I figured that we needed at least some of our community to have relatively current military backgrounds. Think about it, Derek is in the Guard, Mary was in the Army not all that long ago and Damon was in the Navy. You have a regular military family,” he chuckled.

Before Gary could reply, Clarence continued. “You know, I liked that Derek from the minute I laid eyes on him. He’s polite, respectful and did you notice him helping Mary. That boy was raised right! Damon is sort of a ship looking for a port. I think that you sense that, too. I was a little surprised when he said something about taking you up on your offer. Let me guess, you suggested that he come back with us to California and help you get ready for the coming days, am I right?”

“Yes, but how did you...” Gary started to reply only to be cut off by Clarence.

“Gary,” he continued, “You’re pretty smart, most of the time. Now I’ve seen a few instances where you just don’t seem to have any common sense, you know what I mean; but overall you’re a smart guy. I know that your dad bought you a fancy education and all, but they don’t teach common sense in a college. From things you’ve said from time to time, I sensed that you tried to stay out of your boy’s lives. Without realizing it, you were letting them get that common sense that you needed.”

“Damon,” Clarence continued, “Needed you right at this moment in his life. If you hadn’t

suggested that he join us, I probably would have done it myself. From the way I see it, we have plenty of brains and experience among us, with a few obvious exceptions, but what we don't have is a lot of strong backs. And, between you and me, Jan won't be a lot of help in the coming months, she's expecting."

"Great Clarence," Gary responded, "Congratulations. You're right about the lack of brawn. You know, my stepdaughter lives with a fella who has 4 boys from his first marriage. The boys are all in their teens and they, along with their father could sure contribute a lot to *The Ark*. And, you know Chris and Patti have two boys. Daniel is big and strong, but handicapped. I don't really know if he will be of much help. But, their other son, Matt, is fit enough. My daughter Amy's husband, Udell, is nothing but muscle..."

"So you see," Clarence replied, "What Ron and I were talking about when we suggested bring in the families?"

"I do now," Gary replied smiling. "But say, Clarence, most of these young people don't have a pot to pee in or a window to throw it out of. There is no way that they can buy into *The Ark*."

"Sure they can," Clarence, retorted, "It's called sweat equity! And, there's another thing we have to consider, Gary. Remember when we decided how to have a voting structure for our community? How we would vote on new members and such? It's going to be a whole lot easier if we start out with a bit larger of a community made up of members of our five families. 'Course there's a lot of things to work out, but I don't think we need to be so damned fired all anxious to started letting outsiders in; at least, not until we are established."

"That makes sense," Gary commented. "Say, I'm getting just a little hungry, are you up for some lunch? I noticed that they have breaded pork tenderloins on the menu and I haven't had a good breaded pork tenderloin sandwich since I moved to California. In fact, I don't think I've HAD a breaded pork tenderloin since I moved to California!"

They ordered and Clarence continued, "There are a whole lot of practical considerations that we've glossed over in our hurry to put this project together. For instance, you were raised on a farm, but have you really ever farmed? You know what I mean, Gary, have you really ever had the experience of running a farm?"

"Not really Clarence," Gary answered, "We moved to town when I was 11 years old. Of course, I worked at my father's farm implement business while I was in high school and again when I took a break from college, but, now that you ask, I'd have to admit that I'm not really a farmer."

"When I was a boy," Clarence continued, "I lived on a farm, too; but I ain't no farmer. So you see, Gary, we need to have a real farmer as a member of our little community. And you know, Gary, the growing conditions are different every place you go. They grow one thing in Tennessee where I was raised, other things in Iowa where you were raised and

I'd bet that they grow something entirely different in Colorado."

"Now," Clarence continued on a roll, "If we get Derek and Mary to join us, we'll have a real plumber and someone who can handle big rigs. I have no idea about an electrician. I know that Sharon worked in an office same as Jan does. My Lucy has always been a housewife."

"Homemaker," Gary corrected using the more politically correct term.

"Fine, homemaker," Clarence chuckled. "Patti hasn't probably worked outside of the home since Daniel was born. Chris is an audio tech at one of the studios, but it's his hobby that makes him so valuable to us. Building all of those racing cars from scratch, he's obviously one hell of a mechanic and he does sheet metal work and welds. I don't know what Linda's background is. Fred, of course is a paramedic; I am a carpenter; Ron knows about everything there is to know about propane; and, you know, come to think of it, it's you that I don't know about. What did you do growing up?"

"Clarence," Gary frowned, "I was an accountant."

"You were a CPA?" Clarence asked.

"No, I was a tax auditor." Gary reluctantly admitted. "When I finished college, it didn't seem like anyone wanted to hire me. My kid brother was enrolled in Drake's JD-MBA program and he persuaded me to go to graduate school. I enrolled and frankly, loved the study of law. But, it didn't like me; gave me ulcers. So, I ended up dropping out of law school and getting my MBA.

"I worked for the Iowa Crime Commission part-time while I was in school, but when I graduated, I simply could not find a job. I ended up working for Target Stores as a clerk. Of course, I advanced rapidly, made department manager in 3 months, but, the money wasn't very good and I went to work for the Mid-Iowa Drug Abuse Council as the Director of Planning. Four months later, they had a funding crunch and I lost that job. I eventually went to work for the Iowa Department of Revenue as a corporate auditor."

"How long did you work for them?" Clarence asked.

"Until 1992," Gary replied.

"But you moved to California in 1982, you said," Clarence responded.

"Yes and ran their west coast office until I resigned in 1992." Gary offered.

"But, why did you quit?" Clarence asked. "Those government jobs pay good and have great benefits."

"Clarence, that's a long story," Gary said, "Best left untold. I think that I have one thing

in my background that will benefit the community, however. I've collected guns for years. Now, I'm no expert, but there isn't much that I don't know about guns; at least in general terms."

"You're selling yourself short Gary," Clarence replied. "I've known you for a bunch of years and not only are you a HAM operator, you're probably the most organized person I've ever known. Don't take this wrong; Gary, but you're a quitter, too. What you need is someone behind you to give you a push from time to time to keep you on track. Hell, we all have our strengths and our weaknesses. What this group needs to do to be successful is to capitalize on our strengths."

"I don't know what your stepdaughter's man does," Clarence went on, "But it doesn't matter. All those boys of his would make him an asset to the community. He doesn't happen to be an electrician does he?"

"Locksmith," Gary replied.

"Look Gary, I'm glad we had this talk," Clarence said rising. "I think that we have a better idea of some of the things we must accomplish if we are going to make this project work. For one thing, we need to take advantage of your organizational skills. As much as I like Ron, and believe me I do, he just doesn't have your organization skills. I think that the two of you need to work more closely to get us organized. I'm going to take a nap, call Lucy and watch a little TV. Want to get together around 5 pm for dinner?"

"Sure," Gary said and they rose and left.

*In the motel lobby around 5 pm...*

"Gary!" Clarence greeted his friend, "Did you have a good afternoon?"

"I sure did," Gary answered.

"Still down in the dumps?" Clarence inquired.

"Hell no!" Gary replied, smiling. "I spent the afternoon thinking about our conversation. I think we overlooked something when we were in Pueblo. Come on, let's eat."

After they placed their orders, Clarence asked, "What did we overlook?"

"Do you remember that Ron suggested that we form a Colorado corporation for our Homeowners Association?" Gary asked.

"Yes..." Clarence replied. "Oh I see, we should have gotten the ball rolling when we were in Pueblo."

"Probably," Gary said, "But if we return the way we came, we can take care of that on

the way home. We'll have to ask the lawyer, but I think that it might be possible to incorporate as a non-profit corporation. In that way, we can get a 501(c)3 exemption from income tax for the corporation."

Clarence started to laugh.

"Did I say something funny?" Gary asked.

"No," Clarence was barely able to reply, "You see, it's just like I was saying this morning Gary. It's just the way your mind works."



## Chapter Sixteen – Herb

*Thursday morning at the restaurant in Charles City...*

Gary looked up and noticed Clarence entering the restaurant. He waved his friend over and motioned for him to take a seat.

“Morning Clarence,” Gary greeted his friend.

“Good Morning Gary,” Clarence responded cheerfully. “Did you look up some of your relatives yesterday and the day before?”

“Nope!” Gary retorted. “I don’t know three-fourths of them and frankly, I don’t have much in common with those that I do know.”

“Aw, you shouldn’t be like that Gary,” Clarence responded. “You are related to those folks.”

“I suppose you’re right, Clarence,” Gary admitted, “But we’ve just drifted apart. On the other hand, a thought did occur to me yesterday. My cousin John lives in Ft. Collins, Colorado. His wife works at the bank and he’s a farmer. Now, if we could somehow get him interested in our project, we would solve one big problem.”

“Now you’re thinking,” Clarence responded. “What time do you think Ron will be here?”

“He said he would be back this morning,” Gary replied. “I expect to see him right about lunch time. He tends to be a late starter, so I doubt that he’s even left yet. Besides, it’s only an hour’s drive. Figure he’ll leave about 10 am; he should be here a little after 11.”

“Why don’t we check out when he gets here and head back to Ames?” Clarence suggested. “It will give you a little extra time to spend with your sons. ‘Sides, it will put us that much closer to home.”

“Getting anxious to get back, Clarence?” Gary inquired.

“Yes I am,” Clarence smiled, “I don’t like to be away from my Lucy for a long time. And, you know Gary that we have a lot to do and a short time to do it in.”

The waitress came to the table. They placed their orders and resumed their conversation.

“After breakfast,” Gary offered, “I’ll call my cousin Maureen and get John’s phone number. When we get back to California, I’ll give him a call.”

“Why don’t we stop and see him on the way back?” Clarence suggested.

“Clarence, I haven’t even seen the man in 40 years,” Gary smiled. “I think maybe I’d better take this slowly. No, I’ll wait and call him when we get back to California. If he’s anything like most of my kin here in Charles City, he’ll think we’re a bunch of crackpots, too.”

“Whatever you say Gary...whatever you say,” Clarence responded shaking his head.

They chatted through breakfast, catching up on the news, offering opinions about the various candidates in the forthcoming presidential election and so forth. One thing they found that they had in common was their belief that if the Democrats took the White House, guns rights would become history.

And, they agreed that the incumbent president had more weaknesses than strengths. Gary mused how much the country and world had changed since the 1950’s when he was a boy growing up in Charles City. When they had finished eating, Clarence suggested that they meet in lobby around 10:30 am.

*Charles City motel lobby, 10:30 am, Thursday...*

The men checked out, and made arrangements to leave their luggage with the clerk while they had coffee at the restaurant.

“Keep a good eye peeled for Ron,” Gary suggested as they took a booth in the restaurant.

Clarence laughed, “You even sound like a country boy Gary; I’m just not sure from what country!”

Just as the waitress brought their coffee, Ron pulled into the motel’s driveway.

“I’ll get him,” Gary said, rising.

Gary went out and waved and yelled at Ron. He finally got Ron’s attention and Ron headed for the restaurant.

“Hey partner,” Ron said joining Gary. “Did you have a good time in Charles City?”

“Well...I got rested anyway and Clarence and I had a good visit,” Gary replied, leading Ron to the booth.

“Hi Clarence, are you all rested up?” Ron asked acknowledging his friend.

“Reckon so Ron,” Clarence smiled. “How were your daughter and mother?”

“Mom’s really getting old,” Ron answered shaking his head. “She’s 80 and since Paul died a couple of years ago, she has really aged. Paula is the same as ever teaching

school.”

“Still no kids?” Gary asked.

“Nope and I don’t know whether they’ll ever have any,” Ron answered. “They are so caught up in working.”

“Where does your son-in-law work?” asked Clarence.

“Hormel,” Ron answered offering no further information.

“Did you discuss our project with them?” Gary asked.

“Yes I did,” Ron, replied, “They weren’t interested. I don’t know, they are both California born and raised; big city kids. They are having a terrible time adjusting to Austin and are talking about moving back to San Bernardino.”

“What’s Austin like Ron?” Clarence asked.

It’s a nice city,” Ron replied, “Population is about 23,000 give or take. It looks like it would be a nice place to live. They have jobs, good schools, parks, recreation and the whole nine yards.”

“What don’t they like?” Clarence continued.

“Paula said that it’s just too rural,” Ron answered, “I guess I knew, when she said that, that they wouldn’t like living in southern Colorado, but I brought it up anyway. And it was pretty much as I expected they weren’t interested. I suspect Paula thinks we’re crazy, but she was kind enough not to say so. So, what have the two of you been up to?”

They sat, drinking coffee, for the next hour as Clarence recounted Gary and his conversation of Monday afternoon. When he had finished, Ron nodded, and said, “That all makes good sense to me fellas. Let’s eat, I’m hungry.”

“Try the pork tenderloin sandwich,” Gary suggested.

“Sandwich?” Ron responded loudly, “I’m hungry! I don’t want a stinking sandwich.”

“Just try it,” Gary said, “And if you don’t get enough to eat, I’ll buy you any meal on the menu.”

Grudgingly, Ron ordered the pork tenderloin sandwich. When the waitress brought their order, his eyes fairly bugged out.

“Damn,” he said, “The meat must be sticking out 3” from the side of the bun!”

“Yep,” Gary acknowledged, “And, it’s a large bun, too.”

When they had finished eating, Gary told Ron that they intended to drive down to Ames and visit with his family a little more. They retrieved their luggage, got in the Pathfinder and Gary drove to Ames while Ron and Clarence visited. They checked in to the Holiday Inn and went to their rooms after agreeing to meet in the lobby in one hour. Once in his room, Gary called Mary.

“Mary? It’s Gary,” he said into the phone.

“Oh hi Dad,” she replied, “We didn’t expect you guys until tomorrow. Are you coming down?”

“I thought that we’d spring for dinner,” Gary offered, “Why don’t you folks meet us at the motel?”

“Dad,” She said, “Derek is pretty tired and I just think it would be better if you all came on down. We won’t have anything fancy for dinner, but I think it would be better.”

“Ok Mary,” he said, “We will be down in a little while,” and hung up.

A short time later in the motel lobby...

“What’s the plan partner,” Ron asked.

“I suggested that they come up and have dinner with us, but Mary wouldn’t hear of it,” Gary replied. “So, I guess we are going to their place.”

“Good,” Ron said, “Beats the hell out of restaurant food any day!”

They arrived at Derek and Mary's about a half hour later...

“Andpa, andpa,” Elizabeth shouted excited to see her grandfather again. She took him by the hand and jabbering the whole way, led him to ‘her’ room. One by one, she showed him all of her possessions complete with a non-stop explanation in whatever language it is that a 3-year old speaks. Meanwhile, Ron and Clarence joined Mary in the kitchen and they set around the table visiting and drinking coffee. When, eventually, Gary returned to the kitchen, Mary led the men to the lower level of the Split-Foyer.

“What do you think?” she asked indicating the locked storage cabinet and gun safe.

“Nice.” Was all the fellows had to say.

Gary noticed a reloading press sitting on the workbench counter. “What’s this?” he asked.

“Well, Derek and I talked it over and decided that he needed to learn to reload his own ammunition,” Mary replied. “His friend Herb has been reloading for years and gave him his old press to use while he learned. It’s a Dillon 550B. He got a new one for Christmas, same model and everything. Derek and he have had a couple of sessions already. Anyway, he told Derek he would let him have it for \$200. He said he had some duplicate dies that he’d throw in.”

“Do you know which dies?” Gary asked.

“No, you’ll have to ask Derek when he gets home,” she replied.

They returned to the kitchen and while Mary prepared dinner, the men sat and drank coffee.

“Now that’s something I’d never even thought of,” Ron said.

“What’s that Ron?” Clarence asked.

“Reloading our own ammunition.” Ron replied. “I’ve always just purchased ammo from the store for target practice and hunting. However, in a SHTF situation, I do believe that reloading might be important.”

“What kind of surplus ammo was that that you bought for Derek and Damon on Sunday?” Gary asked.

“It was some of the Australian .308 and Federal .223.” Clarence offered, “I didn’t see what the 9mm stuff was. It is all reloadable isn’t it?”

“The Aussie .308 is Berdan primed, I think,” said Gary, “So it won’t be reloadable. However, they should be ok on the Federal stuff, I’m pretty sure it’s Boxer primed.”

“What’s the difference?” Clarence asked.

“Clarence,” Gary replied, “The only thing that I think I know is that the Berdan primed has two primer holes and the Boxer primed has one primer hole. I guess we’ll have to ask Derek and see if he knows.”

Just then, Derek entered the house. “Hi Dad! I didn’t expect you until tomorrow.”

“We decided to come back down a day early,” Gary replied. “Mary showed us the safe and cabinet, they’re nice. And, I noticed a Dillon reloading press downstairs, planning on getting into reloading, are you?”

“Dad, my friend Herb loaned me the press and is teaching me.” Derek responded.

“Mary said he was going to give you some dies, if you bought the press, do you know

what calibers?" Gary asked.

".223, .308, 30-06 and .357," Derek replied.

"Then I'd guess you would need .38 and 9mm die sets as well?" Gary asked.

"Yes, at least the 9mm," Derek replied.

What about reloading shotgun shells?" Gary asked.

"This reloader only does rifle and pistol shells," Derek replied. "I thought maybe I'd get a Lee Loader for the shotgun shells. The Dillon shotgun shell reloader is quite expensive."

"What does your friend Herb have?" Gary asked.

"Do you mean for shotgun shells?" Derek asked, "He has the Dillon SL 900, they run about \$900 dollars."

"Just curious son," Gary said, "By the way, why are Berdan primers not reloadable?"

"Who told you they were not reloadable?" Derek asked.

"Nobody," Gary said, "Whenever I look at surplus ammo ads, they seems to indicate 'Fully Reloadable Boxer Primed,' or Berdan primed. I just assumed that Berdan primed ammunition wasn't reloadable."

"It's reloadable Dad," Derek replied, "It's just harder to reload. You can knock the primer out of Boxer primed ammo with a pin punch; you have to have a hydraulic rig to remove primers from Berdan primed ammo. But, if you have the necessary equipment, I don't think it is much of a big deal. Remember, I'm new at this."

"Supper is ready," Mary said setting dishes of steaming food on the table.

They visited about Charles City, Ron's side trip to Austin and topics of mutual interest throughout supper. After dinner, Derek and the men sat down in the living room.

"Derek, when do you leave for Ft. Stewart?" his dad asked.

"A week from Sunday Dad," Derek replied.

"How long will you be there?" Gary continued.

"Ten or eleven weeks," Derek replied. "Then I get to come home for two weeks. After that, I return to Ft. Stewart and ship out to Germany. We will be in Germany about a month and then we'll transfer to Kosovo for six months."

“So, you should be home from Kosovo in about ten months?” Gary asked.

“Give or take, yes,” Derek responded.

“What then?” Gary asked.

“I don’t know Dad.” Derek replied.

“What is the likelihood that you’ll end up in Iraq?” Ron asked.

“Mr. Green,” there is zero chance that I will end up in Iraq!” Derek stated firmly.

“How can you be so sure?” Clarence asked.

“Because,” said Derek, “I won’t go. Most of the guys in my unit were full time military and joined the Guard after they were discharged. None of us expected to be full time military. If we had wanted that, we would have stayed in. We expected to be called up to help with floods, storms and natural disasters mostly.

“Of course in the event of a real national emergency, no one would give being called up a second thought. But, the administration cut the military too far. We should maintain 15 active duty divisions and we only have 10. Our military is spread too thin. I don’t mean to get on a soapbox, but that’s how I see it.”

## Chapter Seventeen – Derek

*In Derek's living room...*

"As I understand from your father, you are a plumber?" Clarence asked.

"Yes, I just became a journeyman," Derek replied.

"Derek what do you really think of our project?" Clarence continued.

"From what you've told me," Derek responded, "I think that it's a great idea. I can see some problems with it, but overall, I think it has great potential."

"I recall that it was explained that the group consists of Dad, Ron, you, your nephew and Dad's neighbor, is that correct?" Derek asked.

"And our wives, yes, that's essentially correct," said Clarence.

"From what I see," Derek said, "And no offense is intended, this is mostly a group of middle aged men. None of you have some of the skills that are vital to the success of your venture. For example, you don't have a farmer, a plumber, an electrician nor are most of you in fit condition to be starting over

"Three of the 5 of you men have health issues. So, while I think your idea is meritorious, I don't see how you can make it work. Is any one of you wealthy enough to pay to have all of the work done for you? I doubt it! Do I think that your collective wealth is enough to pay for a project of this size? No! For a bunch of men with enough years between you to know better, I don't think you have really thought this through."

Gary was chuckling to himself. This boy of his was wise beyond his years. Oh, they were ahead of him, but for no more than he knew about the project, Derek had made some astute observations. But it's one thing to be wise; and quite another to be able to apply that wisdom; that only comes from experience.

"In view of the short comings that you see son," Gary asked, "What would you suggest that we do to make this work?"

"I think that the first thing that you have to do is fill in the shortcomings in your roster, Dad," Derek replied. "The first thing you'd better do is to find yourself the plumber, the electrician, the farmer and a whole bunch of strong backs."

"Plumber?" Gary responded, "Are you volunteering?"

"Dad," Derek said, "I've got commitments. I have a family to support; I have child support to pay for DJ; and, I have a commitment to the Guard that I can't back out of. So no Dad, I am not volunteering."



“Son I understand your obligations, been there-done that,” Gary replied. “On the other hand, what would keep you from resigning from the Guard when you got back from Kosovo?”

“Nothing I guess,” Derek replied.

“And what if you could get a job as a plumber in Pueblo, would that permit you to provide for your family and pay your child support?” Gary asked.

“Well maybe,” Derek said, “But we just bought this house.”

“You could always sell this house Derek,” Gary replied. “And, if you decided to come to *The Ark*, you’d find a new home waiting for you. So far as the issue of money goes, I’m sure that we could find someone to underwrite any extraordinary expenses in the form of a grant.”

“Gee Dad, I just don’t know,” Derek protested.

“Hey Derek, no one is expecting you to make a decision right now,” Clarence joined the conversation, “We are only asking you to think about it. ‘Sides, you’ll have to discuss this with Mary before you can make a decision. Are you willing to do that much?”

“I suppose,” Derek replied.

“Fair enough, Derek,” Clarence replied. “In the meantime, I would like to extract a promise from you. If things go to hell while you’re in Kosovo, can you promise us that Mary and the babies will bug out and join us in Colorado?”

Mary had been standing in the doorway listening to the conversation. “That’s not for him to promise Clarence, that’s for me to say.”

What do you say, Mary?” Clarence asked.

“Just two words,” she responded, “I promise!”

“Then Derek,” Clarence continued, “If the SHTF while you are in Kosovo, do you promise to join us at *The Ark*?”

“If Mary and the children are there, NOTHING could keep me away!” Derek retorted.

“One final question folks,” Clarence asked, “Will the two of you give serious consideration to joining us in Colorado after you get home from Kosovo, assuming everything is alright?”

“Yes,” they responded in unison.

“Can’t ask for anything more than that, now can we!” Clarence announced, triumph in his voice.

They visited for another hour. Realizing that Derek was tired, Gary suggested that they return to their motel. They made their goodbyes and piled, once again, into the Pathfinder. They were all beginning to feel the strain of their trip. There wasn’t any conversation as they drove, and they paused for only a moment to say good night to each other when they reached the motel.

*Holiday Inn, Ames, IA, 8am Friday...*

Gary entered the lobby and discovered Clarence seated, as usual, with a cup of coffee in one hand and a newspaper in the other.

“Gary, good to see you,” Clarence smiled.

“Clarence,” Gary replied, “For the life of me I cannot understand how you can be so cheerful all of the time. How do you do it?”

“Gary, it beats the crap out of the alternative,” Clarence answered.

“Seen Ron?” Gary asked.

“Hey partner, let’s eat!” came Ron’s deep booming voice from across the lobby.

Gary groaned and Clarence smiled and shook his head.

“Morning Ron, good to see you,” Clarence smiled. He rose and joined Ron and Gary as then entered the restaurant.

“Morning Clarence,” Ron replied as they slid into a booth. “Hmm, you don’t suppose that they have a truck drivers special do you?”

“Well, they didn’t have one the other day,” Gary retorted, “Why don’t you just order two of everything?”

“Well maybe I will,” Ron came back laughing.

“We should be on the road back to Colorado by 10 am tomorrow,” Gary cheerfully announced. “We have to see an attorney in Pueblo. I’m sure that John can recommend someone.

"And, speaking of Colorado, I was watching the Discovery Channel last night and they had a program on about the San Isabel National Forest. It has all kinds of wildlife; deer, bear and the occasional elk. What’s more, it has a lake. You know fellas; this property is

in the perfect location.”

Sounds great partner,” Ron replied, “But that raises a whole other concern.”

“What do you mean, Ron?” Clarence asked.

“It will be tough enough to keep out the great unwashed in the event the SHTF,” Ron answered, “BUT, being next to a National Forest full of wild game will expose us even more. Can you imagine what’s it going to be like? People scavenging in the forest looking for something to eat and discovering *The Ark*? That forest will be a magnet drawing people to our sanctuary. Security will be a bitch.”

“Maybe so, Ron, maybe so,” Clarence absently replied, lost in thought.

“Getting back to the wildlife Ron,” Gary said, “They will be a nice supplement to our diet. The only thing is, except for you, none of us has a hunting rifle.”

“Sure you do Gary,” Ron replied, “All you have to do is mount a scope on your M1A and change from ball to soft point ammo. Re-zero the rifle using the scope and hunting ammo and you’re set to go. Besides, we ought to have scopes for those M1A’s anyway. They are one hell of a sniper rifle. Now that we’re on the subject of guns, we ought to check a couple of gun stores in Pueblo and see if they have any SKS rifles in stock. It would also give us an opportunity to become more familiar with the Colorado gun laws.”

“Ron,” Gary said, “I checked the Colorado laws. I can tell you this much, they do not allow NFA firearms. At least, that is my reading of their law. Of course, you’re right; a gun dealer is probably the best single source of information about the Colorado gun laws. I noticed that the law stated that a Sheriff SHALL issue a concealed weapons permit except to otherwise unqualified persons. What I don’t know is how that translates practically.”

“Ron?” Clarence asked, “Have you read anything on the Frugal Story website that might address the security concerns you raised? You’ve gotten me to wondering what various things we can do to ensure our safety.”

“In one of the stories I read, *Pax Americana*, there is a character named David McMillan. He built a home using slip form construction much as we are planning to do. To protect his property, he created a natural fence using a mixture of ‘Thorny Pyracantha (also known as Fire Thorn Bush), Catclaw Acacia, Jumping Chollas and Prickly Pears’. That story took place in northern California so it’s possible that the same plants would work for us. I really don’t know. One other thing, though, he was only encircling 20 acres. I can’t imagine the scale of work it would take to plant 4 miles of those plants.”

“FOUR MILES?” Clarence exclaimed, “Is that how far it is around a section of land?”

“Yes Clarence,” Ron replied. “You saw how big the farm was. It was square, one mile to

the side. I just guessing, you understand, but since 20 acres is  $\frac{1}{32}$ <sup>th</sup> of a section, we would have to plant 32 times as many plants as that fella did in *Pax Americana*. The alternative would be to fence only a portion of *The Ark*; presumably the immediate area around the housing. I think that we would be better off fencing the entire property. But, that would be a lot of work.

“On the other hand, I believe that the McMillan fella did it all by himself, or maybe with his wife’s help. If we used 32 times as many people, the task wouldn’t be any bigger for us than it was for him. Still, *Pax Americana* was fiction, so I am only speculating.”

“Ron?” Clarence asked, “Couldn’t you post a question on the Frugal Squirrel forum and ask whether such a fence were realistic or just a fictional creation?”

“Suppose I could,” Ron replied, “But then I’d have to show my ignorance.”

“Why don’t I call Mary and get Damon’s number?” Gary suggested. “I’ll give him a call and see if he’s home. Maybe, if he’s not busy, he could join us and we could find out what he decided.”

“You could just call him and ask,” Ron suggested.

“Of course I could,” Gary retorted, “But then, I wouldn’t get to see him until tonight.”

## Chapter Eighteen – Damon

*Holiday Inn, Ames, IA, 10am, Friday...*

Damon pulled into the parking lot, parked and sought out the men in the restaurant. He hoped that his father would be pleased with his decision. The kids objected, at first; Aaron had finally broken the ice when he urged his father to go to California. Aaron positively adored his grandfather.

“Hi Dad, Ron, Clarence, how are you?” Damon greeted the men.

“Good Damon,” Clarence responded, “You’re looking good. That’s the second time I’ve seen you smiling.”

“Son?” Gary asked, “Are you going back to California with us?”

“Dad,” Damon replied, “Aaron wants me to go back with you so I can ‘take care of you’.”

“Then you’re coming?” Gary was barely able to contain his excitement.

“Yep,” Damon replied evenly. “I’ve got everything I own in the back of my Junker. I figure that what little I have will fit in the back of the Pathfinder, no problem.”

“Well I don’t know about that,” Ron intoned. “How much stuff do you have?”

“I travel light,” Damon smiled. “I’ve got a duffle of clothes, my computer, and my TV. I’m going to leave the TV at Derek’s. In fact, I thought I’d leave the Junker there and he could sell it for whatever he can get. It isn’t worth much and Mary and he can use the money. You know, when I moved back from Indiana, I lived with them until I could get my own place, so I sort of owe them...”

“I like the way you think Damon,” Clarence interjected. “Seems like you’ve been cleaning out some cobwebs!”

“What the hell,” Damon laughed, “I could use a fresh start. Look fellas, I have a couple of bills to pay and I need to pick up my last paycheck at Casey’s. How about I meet you at Derek’s this afternoon?”

“Are you going to need some money?” Gary asked reaching for his wallet. “Best you make a clean break of it.”

“Naw Dad,” Damon responded holding up his hand, “I’m fine. See you guys later!”

Damon rose and headed for his car. Gary noticed that there seemed to be a spring in Damon’s step; usually, Damon just trudged, now, he fairly bounced.

“Guys,” Ron groaned, “We may have a problem.”

“What do you mean Ron?” Clarence asked.

“Well crap,” Ron replied, “I didn’t plan on this. We have our luggage, Damon’s luggage and computer, all of those mags we bought, 2 cases of MRE’s, a BUNCH of ammo, 5 guns; I just don’t know if we can fit it all in...”

“Ron,” Clarence suggested, “Why don’t we leave Damon’s MRE’s for Derek and Mary? If we pack carefully, I think that the rest of it will fit. It will be tight, I expect, but where there’s a will, there’s a way.”

“And, with Damon with us in California,” Gary mused aloud, “He won’t need those MRE’s. That’s a good suggestion Clarence. What do you think Ron, can we do it?”

“If one of you will loan me a shoe spoon,” Ron grumbled, “We can try.”

The men decided that they should head to Derek’s. On the way, they stopped at a KFC and picked up a large family sized meal.

“Lunch is here!” Gary announced as they entered Derek and Mary’s home.

“Andpa!” Elizabeth bubbled.

“Hi Dad, you didn’t have to do that,” Mary said.

“Mary,” Gary responded, “Haven’t you noticed how much Ron eats? Of course we did! You wouldn’t want Ron to starve, would you?”

They ate a leisurely lunch; Gary trying his best to feed Joshua.

“I give up!” Gary exclaimed. “It’s been too many years!”

Mary assumed the task of feeding her son, grateful that Gary had tried. It was always difficult to eat a meal in peace with a baby in the house. After lunch, the men adjourned to the living room. Elizabeth climbed on her grandfather’s lap and was soon sound asleep. Mary put Joshua down for a nap and joined them.

“Dad?” Mary inquired, “Has Damon made a decision?”

“Indeed he has,” Gary, announced, “He’s coming with us!”

“But what about all of his stuff?” Mary asked.

“Damon said that he travels light,” Gary replied. “Maybe this is out of school for me to say, but he plans on giving you his TV and his car. He said that he owes you folks and

you can sell the car and keep the money. All he has is his clothes and his computer.”

“There is still a lot of his stuff here,” she complained.

“Mary,” Clarence responded, “You may just be going to have the garage sale of the century!”

“Hi guys!” Damon said, entering the residence, “I have everything taken care of and have money left over!”

“We were just talking about you,” Gary replied.

“Oh?” Damon inquired. “Should I be worried?”

“Damon, let’s take a few minutes and sort through the things that you left here with Derek and Mary,” his dad suggested. “We can sort it into two piles, the first being the things that you can’t live without and the second being the things you’re willing to part with. We will get some boxes and ship the former to California via UPS; the latter, Mary can keep or sell as she and Derek see fit.”

Gary carefully handed Elizabeth to her mother. They rose and went to the lower level to help Damon sort through his “stuff”. The only thing that Damon had that he wanted to keep was stored in boxes. They carefully went through each box, Damon discarding his accumulated trash and reserving important documents, pictures and the like. By the time they had finished, the “keep” pile was down to 2 boxes; the “discard” pile contained 2 boxes; and, the remainder was in the “sell” pile.

“It’s amazing how much junk you accumulate,” Damon observed as they finished. “Let’s tape the “keep” boxes up and take them to UPS. Mary, you can sell or discard that pile over there; and I’ll put these two boxes in the trash.”

The men made fast work of taping the “keep” boxes and were finished by the time Damon had taken the “discard” boxes to the trash. They loaded the two boxes into the back of the Pathfinder and Damon and his dad set off to the UPS office. While they were gone, Mary made a fresh pot of coffee and Ron, Clarence and she sat at the kitchen table visiting.

“You know,” Clarence, said, “Something just occurred to me. If we get cases for Damon’s guns and discard the boxes, they will take less room in the Pathfinder. And, if we leave the ammo, there should be plenty of room.”

“Leave the ammo?” Ron exclaimed, “You just bought that!”

“True,” Clarence replied, “We’ll take the .22 ammo and a case of double aught buck, but leave the rest. I was planning on ordering more ammo for the boys when I got back to California anyway. This way, I won’t have to order any more for Derek and Mary, just

now, and I can just replace Damon's."

Gary and Damon returned. Clarence explained about the gun cases and ammo.

"Speaking of ammo," Ron injected, "Do you guys remember that I said we should have flechettes in our ammo supply?"

"I've been meaning to ask you about that Ron," Clarence said, "Just what are flechettes?"

"The best way I know how to describe them Clarence," Ron replied, "Is as darts. They have been around for a long time. Hell, we used them to some extent in Vietnam, or so I've heard. There is an outfit I found on the Internet, called Sabot Designs that manufactures them. They are costly when compared to double aught buck, but are much more effective. I think we should check with Jack tomorrow when we stop to pick up the weapons; who knows, he might just have some in stock."

"I took his card," Gary offered, "Let me go call him and ask."

Gary fished Jack's card out of his wallet, went over to the wall phone and dialed.

"Jack?" Gary said, "This is Gary Olsen, Derek's dad."

"Hi Gary," Jack responded, "Do you have any more money burning a hole in your pocket?"

"Jack," Gary replied, "If the boys had bought those weapons over the period of a year or two, you wouldn't have given it another thought, would you?"

"No, I suppose not," Jack grudgingly agreed. "What can I do for you Gary?"

"Clarence suggested that we overlooked getting cases for the weapons so that the boys could transport them when they go to the range or whatever. Do you have cases for all of the weapons in stock?"

"I have hard cases and soft cases for every weapon in stock, yes" Jack replied.

"One other thing Jack," Gary continued, "Are you familiar with flechettes?"

"Sure," Jack replied.

"Do you stock the ammo?" Gary asked.

"Gary, I have a little on hand," Jack responded, "But the stuff is so expensive that I don't carry much."



"How much do you have?" Gary inquired.

"Uh, let's see," Jack, replied, "I bought 3 cases, that's 300 rounds. I've only sold one box of twenty-five, so 275 rounds, I think."

"And the price?" Gary asked.

"Look Gary," Jack replied, "This stuff has been a real dog. Bought it over a year ago and I've only sold the one box. It's just too expensive for the average guy. Besides, it's not really hunting ammo. Tell you what, I paid about \$200 per case of 100, I'll have to check my records. I'll let you have it for my cost just to get rid of it."

"Thanks Jack," Gary said, "We'll take all of it. Set aside soft cases for all of the weapons plus the flechettes. Didn't have any trouble with Clarence's check did you?"

"Not one bit," Jack beamed. "I'm thinking of closing up my shop and moving to California, that's where all the money appears to be."

"Jack, a gun dealer like you would starve to death in California and you wouldn't be able to sell one-tenth of the models of firearms you carry. Bad idea Jack!" Gary replied.

"Oh," Jack muttered.

"Ok, we'll be in around 10 am tomorrow to pick everything up, see you then." Gary said and hung up the phone.

"You heard most of that," Gary offered. "He has 275 rounds of the flechettes in stock and said we could have it for his cost. I suggest that we take all of it with us and leave Derek some money to order some from the Oregon manufacturer. Ron are you sure that we need 250 rounds per shotgun? That stuff is expensive. Think about all of the other ammo we could buy for the same price."

"Gary," Ron allowed, "I didn't really pay attention to the price. I did notice, however, that they sell the assembled ammo and the sabots. If Derek can reload, I'm sure we could save some by loading our own. Meanwhile, I suppose that 100 rounds per weapon would be enough."

"Hi everyone," Derek called entering through the back door.

"We were just talking about you," Gary laughed.

"What did I miss?" Derek asked.

"Nothing much," Gary replied, "We were just talking about reloading and your name came up."

“Yeah, no big deal,” Clarence confirmed.

“Derek,” Gary said, “Take a seat. We are leaving tomorrow and there is a lot to discuss. First, I want you to buy the Dillon press from Herb. Second, I want you to acquire whatever it is that you will need to be able to reload 9mm, .38, .357 and .45 auto. Then, give me a call and let me know what you are going to need for supplies to be able to reload all of the calibers that you have dies for.

“Third, get a Lee Loader for 12-gauge and 20-gauge shotgun shells and get Herb to teach you how to use them. Fourth, Ron says that there is a company in Oregon that manufactures the sabot flechettes. I want you to buy 1,000 of the sabots and, if you have time, load them into shells. If you have to leave before you can assemble the shells, perhaps Herb will do it for you.”

“Dad!” Derek replied, “I’m leaving for Ft. Stewart in 9 days. There is no way that I can accomplish all of that in so short of a time!”

“Probably not son,” Gary offered trying to calm Derek, “I realize that that is a lot to do in so short of a time. Mary can handle some of it for you after you leave. If you can talk to Herb, maybe he can help out. Surely he can answer all of the questions about supplies and you can ask him to load the flechettes. He might even be willing to sell you his loading heads and dies for the calibers you need, if he has them. We’ll leave you enough cash so that you can pay him new price for the setups. That way, he will have all new loading heads and dies for his new press and you will be all set. Does that seem fair?”

“Look at the time!” Mary exclaimed. “I’d better get supper started.”

Nonsense!” Ron said, “I noticed a Buffet-style restaurant on the south side of town last weekend. I love buffets; all you can eat for one low price!”

## Chapter Nineteen – Flechettes

They ate dinner at the buffet. Ron made several trips to the line, filling his plate each time. Finally, he announced, “I’m full!”

“I never thought I live to see that day,” Clarence ribbed his friend.

“Dad, why don't we all go back to the house?” Derek suggested.

“I thought we’d be on our way Derek,” Gary replied, “We have a long day ahead of us.”

“I wouldn’t ask if it weren’t important Dad,” Derek insisted.

“Alright but only for a short time,” Gary caved in.

When they arrived back at the house, Derek said, “Come with me fellas, there is someone I want you to meet.”

Derek led them to the house across the street from his and rang the doorbell. A lady answered the door. “June, is Herb in?” Derek asked.

“I’ll get him. Come in Derek, gentlemen,” she replied.

A man, probably in his early forties came from the living room. “Hi Derek?” He said a question clear in his voice.

“Herb,” Derek said, “I’d like you to meet my father, Gary, and his two friends Ron and Clarence.”

“Gentlemen,” Herb acknowledged, shaking each of their hands. “What can I do for you?”

“Herb?” Derek asked, “Do you suppose you could show my Dad and his friends your reloading bench?”

“What’s this about Derek?” Herb asked, apparently reluctant to share his private world with the men he didn’t know.

“Herb,” Derek replied, “Dad is going to give me the money to buy your reloading press and they have some questions. You have my word that they are ok.”

“Sure Derek,” Herb replied cautiously, “Come on down to my ‘Private Little World’ as June calls it.”

Herb led them to the basement stairs and they descended. The men were awestruck as they entered a door that had a sign over it that announced, “Herb’s Private Little World.”

They couldn't believe the amount of reloading equipment that Herb had. Not only did he have a new Dillon 550B, he had the SL900 and a couple of machines none of them recognized.

"Pardon my asking, but what is that monster," Gary asked.

"That is my pride and joy, a Super 1050 and that machine over there is an XL 650." Herb responded, the pride in his voice. "I do this full time now. I reload for about 50 gun shops in the area and for a couple of the gun clubs. In fact, I just signed a contract with the Des Moines Police Department to reload for them. I can crank out several thousand rounds per day."

"All from this location?" Ron asked.

"Up until now, yes," Herb replied, "But I'm moving the heavy equipment to a store front next week. This is too big of an operation for a residential area. Besides, even though Huxley is a small town, I'm sure that I'm breaking a bunch of zoning laws."

"You must have some political clout," Ron said, "If you've managed to keep them off of your back for this long!"

"Not really," Herb replied laughing, "Being on the City Council doesn't hurt, though. Anyway Derek, what can I do for you?"

"Herb, I need reloading heads for 9mm, .38, .357 and .45 auto for the 550B I'm buying from you. Dad suggested that I pay you full new price as an encouragement. Do you think we could work something out?"

"Derek, you're an answer to my prayers!" Herb replied. "You see I need a .40 S&W head for the XL to fulfill the contract with the DMPD. And, I also need .357 and 10mm heads. I don't know that's its completely fair, but if you'll spring for those three heads for the XL, I'll not only give you the heads that you want, I'll toss in a other few things that I have duplicates of."

"Herb, it's a real question as to who is answering whose prayers," Gary said.

"Huh?" Herb replied.

"Never mind Herb," Derek said, "Dad just likes to use big words. You know I'm leaving for Ft. Stewart in a few days Herb. Dad wants me to load up a bunch of shotgun shells for him. The problem is that I don't have the Lee Loaders, the sabots nor the time. So, I was wondering if we could work something out?"

"Sure Derek, I suppose so, you said sabots?" Herb inquired.

"Yes, Dad wants me to get some flechette sabots from a company up in Oregon and

load him a bunch of flechette ammo.” Derek replied.

“Do you mean from Sabot Designs?” Herb asked, laughing.

“Yes, that’s the place,” Ron offered, “Why?”

Herb walked over to a door, unlocked it using a key on his key ring and turned. “Follow me gentlemen. Anyone from California who has a regular haircut, shaves and knows about flechettes is someone I know I can trust. Behold!”

The men entered the room. There was a collective whistle as they observed enough cases of ammo to fight World War III, stacks of white pails labeled, “Red Winter Wheat”, “Rice,” and so forth.

“You’re, you’re a survivalist!” Derek exclaimed.

“Hey,” Herb retorted, “Don’t say that too loud; aside from June, the 4 of you are the only people in this whole town that knows that. I don’t want it getting around. Now, Gary, about those flechettes, how many rounds do you need?”

“How many do you have?” Gary asked, dumbfounded.

“More than you want,” Her replied, “I can assure you of that!”

“I can’t believe that,” Gary retorted politely.

“Gary, I have been purchasing sabots and loading the shells a quite a while. I won’t say how many I have, but, how many do you think you want?”

“I can answer that,” Ron interrupted, “I suggested that we have 250 rounds of flechette per shotgun. We have 7 12-gauge shotguns and have arranged with a fella to buy his supply of flechettes. That will net out to 1,475 shells.”

“Is that all you need?” Herb responded. “Hell boys, I’ve many times that amount!”

“Just to be safe, we could use maybe 20 100 round cases,” Ron mumbled, shaking his head. “How much do you want for the stuff?”

Herb started to laugh, “Well boys, I won’t gouge you, what do you say to \$150 per case?”

“\$150 a case?” they echoed.

“Can you part with 30 cases at \$150 per case?” Clarence asked, fully composed.

“Sure!” Herb said, “I’ve been wanting to rotate my stock. Derek, is Damon at your

house?”

“Yes,” Derek mumbled.

“Each of those cases has a label on it indicating the date that I loaded it. Be sure you take the oldest cases. Grab two and take them to your house. Bring Damon back and haul the rest of it to your house. Meanwhile, gentlemen, if you’ll join me at my bench, we figure out what everything comes to.”

Herb grabbed a calculator and entered some numbers. “Boys that will be \$4,500 for the shells, \$200 for the press, and let’s say \$300 for the dies. Can you handle that?”

“Clarence said, “Will you take a check drawn on Wells Fargo bank?”

“Sure why not, it’s not like it’s an out-of-state bank or anything,” Herb laughed.

Ron was standing there muttering under his breath. Gary turned to his friend and asked, “What’s wrong, Ron?”

“It will never fit in the Pathfinder,” Ron muttered.

“You have a trailer hitch?” Gary asked.

“Yeah, why?” Ron replied.

“Well, I was thinking that we could get a small U-Haul trailer for a one way trip to California.” Gary replied. “It will cost us some, but with what we saved on the flechettes, we won’t be out a dime!”

When the boys had finished hauling their bounty to Derek’s home, Herb handed Derek the loading heads for the 550B. He put several things in a box and handed the box to Ron who grunted under the weight and promptly sat it down. Damon and Derek returned and Derek hauled the box back to his house. The men were busy telling their newest survivalist buddy all about their plans for The Ark. Derek returned.

“Herb, there’s one more thing.” Derek said.

“What might that be Derek?” Herb asked. “Do you need to know what you’re going to need for reloading supplies in case you decide to move to Colorado?”

“Uh...how did YOU know?” Derek stumbled.

“I’ve been visiting with the guys here and they filled me in on *The Ark*. If I were you Derek, I’d join them in Colorado just as soon as you get back from overseas. I figured that they’d nominated you to reload their ammo for them.

"I have a pretty good idea from listening to them what they have for armament. I'll put together a list for you, is Wednesday soon enough? And you know what Derek, if the SHTF and things go to hell here in Iowa, I might just load up all of my things and join these fellas in Colorado, if they'll have me."

Derek was dumbfounded. Hell, even Herb was ahead of him. "Herb," he asked, "you wouldn't happen to be an electrician or farmer would you?"

"No Derek, none of the above." Herb laughed.

"But, you were in the service, right?" Derek asked.

"Sure was, Derek, during the 1980's"

"What branch?" Derek asked.

"Navy," Herb replied.

"Navy?" Damon brightened, "I was in the Navy, what did you do in the Navy?"

"I was a SEAL," Herb replied.

## Chapter Twenty – Plugging Holes

[Authors note: Herb and June Johnson are Iowa natives and have lived in Huxley since they married right after Herb got out of the Navy. They have two sons, William (Bill) a high school junior and Herbert, Jr. a 9<sup>th</sup> grader. June teaches sixth grade; Herb hadn't been completely honest with the men; for the first half dozen years after he'd gotten out of the Navy, he had been an electrician. After that, he had worked for Iowa Public Service Company, the local electrical utility company as a linesman until he'd quit to reload full time.]

"A SEAL?" The 5 men chorused.

"Herb, you wouldn't like to move to Colorado as soon as we get it up and running would you?" Ron stammered.

"No Ron," Herb replied evenly, "But if it looks to me like things are going to hell in a handcart, expect to see me on your doorstep."

They shook hands and the 5 men returned to Derek's.

"Derek, we want to get an early start tomorrow, if it's ok with you, we'll be here around 8am." Gary said.

"Sure Dad," Derek replied, "We'll have breakfast ready."

"Thanks Derek," his dad replied, "But don't bother. We will have eaten long before then. You all have a good night's sleep. We'll see you in the morning."

They got into the Pathfinder and headed for Ames.

"Did you see how many cases of ammo that guy had?" Ron said. "I tried to count, but couldn't keep it straight in my head. And calibers! Hell, he must have had ammo loaded in a couple of dozen calibers, at the very least."

"While you were busy checking out the ammo, Ron, I had a look at his food supplies. He had all kinds of grains in those white pails, cases of no. 10 cans plus a few cases of MRE's. I also noticed that he had some kind of a grain mill, a water filter, camping equipment; I could go on and on. We need to adopt this guy, he's light years ahead of us," Clarence added.

"In the first place, survivalist or not," Gary said, "We don't know anything about the guy. I got the impression that he was holding something back. What I don't know and why I don't know. It's just an impression I got. Frankly, I surprised that the two of you didn't notice it."

"Would you listen to the character expert?" Ron laughed. "Partner, you've come some



way in the past 3-4 years if you can sense that. But, you're right he was holding something back. Still, he did right by us. Last I checked, the flechette shells were about \$2.50 per round in quantities of 100 from Sabot Designs including tax and postage. I figure that we just saved about \$3,000. Hell, we could BUY a trailer with the money we saved."

"Why don't we?" Gary asked.

"Why don't we what?" Ron retorted.

"Why don't we buy a trailer with the money we saved?" Gary said, "Look, we can always use a trailer. And if you reduce the cost by the amount we'll have to pay U-Haul to rent a trailer, we could end up with a fairly reasonably priced trailer. In fact, I'll tell you what. If I can find a reasonably priced trailer in the morning, I'll just buy it. If not, I'll rent a U-Haul and we'll be on our way."

"Gary, hold it!" Clarence shouted.

"What?" Gary asked.

"Look over there on the left side of the road," Clarence said excitedly.

"Well, I'll be flipped!" Ron said.

Gary just chuckled as he pulled into the trailer business Clarence had spotted.

They parked and got out to look at the trailers. There were both new and used trailers on the lot.

"Can I help you gents?" a voice came out of the darkness.

Startled, Gary turned to see a man walking toward them with what appeared to be an order book in his hand.

"We were driving by and happened to notice the trailers," Gary said. "We're on our way back to California tomorrow and have discovered that we have more to take back than we can fit into the Pathfinder. We thought that if we could find a reasonably priced trailer, we might be better off buying one than renting one."

"What size did you have in mind? By the way, my name is Bob Brown, nice to meet you." The salesman, Bob said.

"We don't really have all that much stuff," Gary continued, "but it is a lot more than will fit in the car."

"Gents, it sounds like you only need a small trailer." Bob said, "I have the same size as the small U-Haul, both new and used. However, I took a 10' open top trailer in on trade

today. It needs tires, but other than that, it's in pretty good shape. If I could turn it over in one day, I'd be willing to give you a darn good price. Frankly, I don't get much demand for open trailers."

They dickered for a while and agreed on a price. "Bob, could you put new tires on the trailer and add a new spare? We'll pay for them. Oh, and could you repack the wheel bearings?"

"Sure can gents. You said you were leaving for California in the morning? What time?" Bob asked.

"We were planning on leaving at 8 am," Gary replied, "Is that pushing it too much?"

"A bit," Bob answered, "But I can have it ready to roll by 8:30 am."

"Hell yes, partner, let's do it!" Ron exclaimed.

Gary and Bob went into the small office building and Ron and Clarence returned to the Pathfinder. Gary returned to the Pathfinder a few minutes later carrying a folded tarp and what looked to be some sort of set of bungee cords.

"Got a tarp and some tie downs while I was at it," Gary announced. They returned to the motel and Ron suggested that a nightcap might be in order. After a moment's reflection, they all agreed. It had been a long trip and they were tired. Maybe a drink was what they all needed.

"Fellas," Gary said, "This trip has been...well quite the trip!"

"You know partner it's starting to come together." Ron said, "I have a feeling that the Good Lord is looking out for us. Heck, I wouldn't be surprised if we don't have a farmer type and an electrician type in the fold real soon."

"Ron, you're just as right as rain," Clarence added. "The housing market is pretty fair at the moment, I'd bet that we'll get our asking price for our homes. Now if Gary can persuade David and Lorrie to join us, we will have a step up on manpower. You other son-in-law needs a good swift kick in the butt, Gary, and Fred and I are just the men to do it."

"Why do you say that Clarence?" Gary asked.

"Gary, it's hard to explain," Clarence responded gently. "That Udell has his head stuck plum up his butt. He's so busy being black that he hasn't taken time to be a human being. He was raised in south central. He was a gang member. He quit school. You said it yourself in some ways he is lazy. I would venture that he was raised on welfare. That's not his fault, but it gave him an attitude. Compare Udell to Fred and me. Do you have the impression that he has the same attitude that we do?"

“Now that you mention it Clarence, it wouldn’t seem that he does.” Gary replied, taken aback by Clarence’s candor.

“And, Gary, Udell is a drunk,” Clarence added. “He’s ok, I’d bet as long as he’s around Amy and the kids. But, he was raised in a whole different culture from what Amy was. He’s not a bad person, but he won’t listen to you no matter how much you try to help him and advise him. Fred and I, on the other hand just might be able to get his attention. Do you have any objections if we try?”

“No Clarence, be my guest,” Gary said, “It can’t hurt. I know that his drinking has made their marriage pretty shaky at the moment.”

The men finished their drinks and headed to bed.

*Holiday Inn – Ames, IA, 7 am, Saturday...*

The men drifted into the lobby one by one. Clarence came first, Gary second and Ron last. They checked out, and then placed their luggage in the back of the Pathfinder. They then drifted into the restaurant.

They placed their orders and started to visit.

“I can’t believe it Ron,” Clarence said, “You only ordered two eggs and toast. Aren’t you feeling well?”

“No, I feel fine,” Ron replied, “But this morning when I pulled out a clean pair of pants, I noticed that either they had shrunk or I had expanded. I’m assuming the worst, so I’ll be on my good behavior. I sometimes forget myself. I suppose that’s it’s just a personality quirk, but when I’m in the public eye, I tend to overeat. I can promise you that Linda doesn’t feed me like I’ve been eating since we left California.”

“Well, that’s good to hear Ron,” Clarence said. “I suspected as much, but it wasn’t my place to say anything.”

The men finished their meals, had another cup of coffee, paid their checks and headed for the Pathfinder. They got in, drove to the trailer lot and picked up their new used trailer. Fifteen minutes later, they were parked in front of Derek and Mary’s home. As they disembarked, Herb came out of his house and approached them.

“Hi fellas,” he said.

“Good morning Herb, how are you this fine day?” Clarence said, responding for the group.

“Tired,” Herb admitted. “I had a rough night. I wasn’t completely honest with you fellas

last night and, well, I didn't sleep so good. I talked it over with June and she said that I ought to come clean right away."

"What do you mean?" Gary asked.

"For the first 6 years after I got out of the Navy, I was an electrician. Then, I worked for Iowa Public Service Company as a linesman for several years. I've only been reloading full time for about 6 months." He admitted.

"Electrician?" They replied.

"I'm afraid so," Herb admitted. "Anyway, I've been thinking about *The Ark* most of the night. I'm committed to the DMPD for 6 months, but I wouldn't have to renew the contract. June agrees with me, by the way. How would you fellas feel about us joining your community in about, say, 6 months?"

"I for one appreciate your honesty, however belated," Gary said, "What say fellas do you think that we should present it to the group when we get home?"

"Hell, nobody's perfect," Ron, snorted, "I'd say that we should."

"I agree totally," Clarence, said, "I'd prefer to believe that Herb was just being cautious around a group of men that he'd just met. Remember guys, when Ron first brought this idea up, we didn't immediately jump on the bandwagon."

"Herb, give us your phone number and we'll let you know," Clarence said. "I expect that the group would be glad to have you and June and your two boys."

"That's a relief," Herb said. "I'll tell June."

"Herb, can I ask you one question?" Clarence inquired.

"Shoot Clarence," Herb replied.

"What does June do," Clarence asked, "I assumed that she was a homemaker."

"Clarence, she teaches 6<sup>th</sup> grade," Herb responded, "I thought that you knew."

The men just shook their heads in disbelief.

"Hi Dad, what's up?" Derek asked, "I saw you in a meeting with Herb and didn't want to butt in. My curiosity got the better of me."

"It turns out," Gary said turning to his son and smiling, "That Herb IS an electrician."

"But you said..." Derek said turning to his friend Herb.

"I'm sorry Derek," Herb responded a little shame faced, "I just didn't want to say too much last night. Besides, I've asked your Dad and the others if we can join them in Colorado as soon as my DMPD contract is up."

If Derek was hurt by his friend's admission, he didn't show it. "Herb, Mary and I will be back about eleven, will you be home? I've got something that I want to show you."

"Sure Derek," Herb replied, obviously relieved, "I see you around eleven."

"Derek, do you have a bunch of old boxes?" Gary asked.

"Sure Dad, Damon left a whole bunch of empty boxes, why?" his son quizzed.

"Those flechette shells that we bought are illegal in California," Gary replied. "I thought that if we packed the boxes inside of bigger boxes and put some of Damon's stuff in the top of each box, we could pass the stuff off as household goods in the event that we stopped."

"Good thinking Dad, Damon and I will get right on it," Derek replied.

"You have any other devious things in mind?" Ron asked.

"Only if necessary Ron," Gary laughed, "Only if necessary."

After they had loaded the "household" goods in the trailer, Damon added his computer and TV for good measure. He apologized to Derek for renegeing so far as the TV went, but Derek just said that he thought the TV would add to the cover. Derek and Mary took the kids and headed for Francis' home. Derek told his Dad that they would see them at Jacks. The men boarded the Pathfinder and bid a fond farewell to Huxley.

*Jack's gun shop, Des Moines, 10:30 am...*

"Hi Jack," Derek said.

"Oh, hi Derek," Jack replied.

"Jack, we happened across a bunch of flechette ammo for \$150 dollars a hundred." Clarence said, "How close can you come to matching that price?"

"Clarence, I've got more than that in it; on the other hand, it's not moving at all," Jack responded. "Tell you what, I'll match the price on one condition. I bought a lot of 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " 12 pellet 00 buckshot on a manufacturer's promotion and it's not moving well either. The price I quoted on the flechette came to \$550. So, if you'll agree to spend the difference on the 00 buckshot, I'll sell you the flechettes for \$150 a hundred."

“You have yourself a deal,” Clarence responded.

“Clarence,” Jack continued, “Maybe we could help each other out here.”

What do you have in mind?” Clarence asked.

“Clarence,” Jack continued, “I got one hell of a discount on those shells by purchasing a full pallet load. They are packed in 5 round boxes, 50 boxes to the case. I could let you have them, if you bought enough that is, for \$150 a case. That’s \$3 a box Clarence and I defy you to find a lower price.”

“And just how many cases would we need to buy to get a price like that?” Clarence asked.

“25 Clarence,” Jack replied evenly.

“And, how many boxes would we get on the adjustment on the flechettes?” Clarence asked.

Jack punched the calculator a few times. “Clarence, I can give you 46 boxes, aw hell, make it an even case in adjustment on the flechettes.”

“Jack, may I use your calculator?” Clarence asked.

“Why sure Clarence, here you go,” Jack said handing him the calculator.

Clarence in turn punched in a few numbers.

“I’ll tell you what Jack, we will take the flechettes and 28 cases of the double aught buck at the prices agreed upon.”

You could have heard a pin drop.

“Why sure Clarence,” Jack stammered, “Whatever you say.

“But first Jack,” Clarence continued, “Get these young people their guns, they’ve waited long enough for them.”

“Of course Clarence,” Jack replied.

Clarence took Derek aside. He explained that Derek and Mary should put their guns in the truck and come back in. Damon, he explained would be putting his guns into the gun cases. When they returned, Derek offered to help Damon by carrying the boxes to the truck while Damon took his arms to the Pathfinder. What Jack didn’t know, wouldn’t hurt him, Clarence explained. Clarence confirmed that Derek had kept 5 cases of Herb’s

flechette shells. He also confirmed that Derek had followed his precise instructions and had put an extra empty cardboard box on the trailer.

He instructed Derek to put the flechettes that they were getting from Jack in the empty box on the trailer and to put the 00 buck on the trailer in plain sight for now. He reminded Derek to be sure and keep 4 cases of the 00 buck for himself and Mary. They would keep Jack busy so that no one observed Damon's weapons being placed in the Pathfinder.

The check that Clarence wrote came to nearly \$5,000. Things went smoothly and in a short while, they were gathered in the parking lot.

"Well Derek, Mary," Gary said, "I hope to see you soon. Derek, you keep your powder dry and stay away from those mines. Mary, get Herb to help you with the BOB's after Derek leaves; Derek and you can spend extra time together."

Embracing his son and then his daughter-in-law, Gary practically rushed to get behind the wheel of the Pathfinder. The rest of them said their goodbyes.

"Well partner," Ron said, "Let's get this show on the road."

## Chapter Twenty-one – Lose Ends

*West of Des Moines on I-80...*

“Clarence?” Ron asked, “Why didn’t you mention the problem with the rifled barrels sooner?”

“Ron, I was the only one of us that bought the shotgun with the rifled barrel,” Clarence replied. I discovered the mistake in a magazine article I read on Tuesday. I got on the phone to Melissa right away and persuaded her to change my order. She was reluctant at first, but when I told her she could keep the difference, she readily agreed.”

“How much was the difference?” Ron inquired.

“Ron, the difference in the MSRP, or so she told me, is only \$33,” Clarence smiled, “And with the discounts and everything, it was under \$30.”

“But that means...” Ron started.

“That Jack screwed up!” Clarence said finishing the sentence for his friend. “I caught that right away. But, I figured, ‘what the hell,’ with the amount of money we spent in his store, he can go on vacation. And another thing, I borrowed Gary’s laptop and surfed the web while we were in Charles City. The best price I could find on the 12 pellet 00 buck was \$3.70 a box of 5 at Cheaper than Dirt, so I knew Jack was offering us a good deal on that double aught.”

“Hey Gary,” Clarence called to his friend.

“Yeah Clarence,” Gary responded over his shoulder.

“I think it’s real clever what you did hiding that flechette ammo and all, but...” Clarence offered.

“But what Clarence?” Gary asked.

“But do we REALLY want to haul almost 3,000 rounds of illegal ammo all the way to California and then all the way back to Colorado?” Clarence responded with a question. “I mean I’ve gone my whole life without so much as a traffic ticket. I’ve made it a practice not to draw attention to myself. I’d sure hate to start now!”

“Hmm,” Gary replied, “Maybe you’re right Clarence, what do you suggest?”

“Well,” Clarence offered, “We could get a storage locker in Pueblo. We could leave all of Damon’s extra stuff plus all but a few rounds of the flechette there. So far as the double aught goes, why don’t we leave all but 6 cases of it in storage, too? All we need to do is pattern the flechette shells. Hell we can dump 25 rounds in one of our suitcases, loose.



If we get stopped, or God forbid, have an accident, we can explain away 6 cases of double aught as a sale bargain we picked up in Iowa. They sell the same double aught in California; I saw some in Melissa's store. And one more thing, I suggest that we leave Damon's FAL in the locker, too. The gun he has is also illegal in California."

"And I thought I was being clever!" Gary snorted, "Clarence, I feel like I'm a day late and several dollars short!"

"Speaking of drawing attention to ourselves," Ron said, "this wholesale buying spree we've been on purchasing firearms is bound to get the attention of the ATF!"

"Maybe and maybe not Ron," Clarence said calming his friend. "And, so what if it does? As restrictive as the gun laws are in California and as open as we've been with our purchases, I don't see a problem. I mean hell, so what if they check; none of us has a felony conviction. And, most of the weapons are sporting arms, which reminds me, I almost forgot about the mags, we best leave them in storage, too."

"Ok Clarence," Ron replied, looking at Gary, "What say partner, do we get a storage locker in Pueblo?"

"It makes sense to me!" Gary replied.

The conversation ebbed and flowed as they continued westward. Most of the conversation was between Damon and Clarence. By the time they had reached a stopping point, near Grand Island, Nebraska, the men were ready to call it a day. They found an out-of-the-way motel and checked in, agreeing to assemble in 30 minutes for supper.

As they assembled, Clarence said, "I don't feel comfortable leaving all of the ammo on an open top trailer... Do you suppose that we should move it into one of our rooms?"

"Clarence," Ron replied, "That would just draw attention to us. Why don't we pull revolving guard duty? Damon?" he continued, "Would you be willing to hang around and keep an eye on the trailer while we eat?"

"Sure, no problem," Damon said, "Will you guys bring me back a burger and fries when you come back?"

"No problem!" the men chorused.

The men ate quickly, a sense of urgency at their 'dilemma', gnawing at them. When they returned, Damon gratefully took the food and ate rapidly.

"How do we want to handle this?" Ron asked.

"Handle what?" Gary inquired.

“Security,” Ron retorted. “You know our getting a storage locker was a great idea. Otherwise, we’ll have to guard this stuff all of the way back to California.”

“Do you have a suggestion?” Clarence asked.

“Well, I think that we should let Gary get his sleep being he is doing most of the driving,” Ron offered, “Why don’t you spell Damon in about 3 hours and I’ll spell you about 4 hours later?”

“Fine by me,” Clarence replied.

“Me, too” Damon answered.

The night went without incident and after a quick breakfast, the men resumed their journey.

“I called John last night,” Gary said after they had been on the road for a few minutes.

“Oh?” the men responded.

“Yeah, I asked how things went with the property,” Gary continued. “He said that the escrow company had received the check, but that he hadn’t sent Kathy her commission. In fact, they hadn’t closed escrow yet...”

“Why’s that Gary?” Clarence was the first to inquire.

“It seems,” Gary continued, “That we sort of got the cart before the horse again. They opened the escrow in the names of us five men. However, since he wasn’t certain of that’s how we wanted to leave it, they had left the escrow open. So, we need to resolve that issue. And while I was at it, I asked John if he could rent us a small storage locker. He said it wouldn’t be a problem.”

“What do you suggest we do?” Clarence asked.

“Well,” Gary went on, “Most corporate attorneys keep a couple of inactive shell corporations around for emergencies. John gave me his home address and suggested that we stop by when we hit Pueblo. He said he’d take us to the storage facility and we could unload our things. We can ask him for the name of a good corporate attorney when we see him tonight.”

“My, he’s being helpful,” Clarence observed.

“And why not,” Gary retorted, “It turns out that he is the broker. The real estate commission was 10% or \$33,000 and he gets to keep 70% of the commission. He only had the property on the market for a week. I’d say he made out pretty good!”

“Why that’s...” Clarence started.

“Over \$23,100 for a week’s work,” Ron said finishing Clarence’s sentence. “He should be helpful! We’re in the WRONG business partner.”

The men continued westward, stopping only at a McDonald’s drive-thru for a quick lunch that they consumed as they drove. They arrived in Pueblo before dark. After a bit of trouble, they found John’s home in one of the better Pueblo neighborhoods. John seemed glad to see them and they immediately departed for the storage facility. When they arrived at the storage facility and the men unloaded the trailer while Gary took John aside to visit.

“Here you go Gary,” John said, handing Gary a plastic bag.

What’s in there?” Gary asked.

“I picked up a couple of security locks for your locker,” John replied, “I figured that you wouldn’t have thought of it.”

“Thanks John,” Gary said, “You’re right, we hadn’t thought of it. Guess we have too much on our minds.” Gary looked into the bag. There sat two spanking new locks, still in their blister packs.

After he’d taken the locks to Clarence, Gary returned. “On the matter of whose name the property should be in, John, could you recommend a good corporate lawyer?”

“Why not use the law firm I use?” John suggested, “Mel has been in business for years and is sharp as a tack.”

“Sounds fine to me,” Gary responded.

“I’ll tell you what,” John offered, “When I get home, I’ll give Mel a call and make an appointment for you. But first, tell me what you have in mind.”

“We were planning on forming a non-profit corporation as the Homeowner’s Association and having the property in the name of the Association,” Gary explained.

“I see,” John said, removing a piece of paper and pen from his inside jacket pocket, “And do you folks have a name for the corporation?”

“How about *The Ark Homeowner’s Association*?” Gary replied.

“That should work,” John answered. “Well, I’ve got to be on my way Gary; the wife must have supper ready by now. Be sure to call me in a couple of hours and I’ll let you know about the meeting with Mel.”

The men finished unloading the trailer, locked the storage locker and sought out a motel. While they enjoyed a leisurely dinner, Gary reported on his conversation with John. They all agreed that dumb luck was better than having no luck at all, and concluded that surely they must have a guardian angel looking out for them.

As they rose to leave, Gary said, "I'm going to hang the Do Not Disturb sign on the handle of my door fellas. You will all just have to wait until morning to find out what happens next. I'm going to give John a call and go to bed. Let's get together for breakfast around 7:30."

They parted ways and once in his room, Gary called John. John advised that the earliest Mel could see them was 10 am. Gary undressed, crawled into bed and was asleep in seconds.

*The motel lobby, Pueblo, CO, 7:30 am, Monday morning...*

Gary entered the lobby to find Clarence, Ron and Damon engaged in conversation. He checked himself and Damon out and joined them.

"Morning fellas, what's going on?" he asked.

"There was a bombing in Mecca, Saudi Arabia," Clarence replied, "Hundreds, perhaps more were killed. The Arabs are blaming the Israelis, and the Israelis are denying knowledge. I think that we're going to have to advance our timetable."

"Would that we could fellas," Gary muttered, "Would that we could..."

The men had breakfast, and then lingered over their coffee.

"Damon, how much do you like to camp out?" Gary asked.

"What did you have in mind, Dad?" Damon responded.

"Well..." Gary continued, "What would you guys say to our getting Damon a tent and having him stay at the property while we return to California?"

"A tent?" Damon reacted.

"Sure Damon, we'll get you tent, a folding cot, a propane stove, lantern and plenty of grub," his father replied. "You can busy yourself cleaning up around the old homestead for us. Since we own the property, we're well on our way. We will conclude things as fast as we possibly can in California and join you in a month or two. You can get your rifle out of storage and become familiar with it. We'll stop by a gun store and pick up some ammo. What do you say?"

"Ok Dad!" Damon replied, "I'll do it."

They paid their checks, got in the Pathfinder and headed for the attorney's office.

"Hello," Gary said to the receptionist, "My name is Gary Olsen and I have an appointment."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Olsen," She replied noting the assembled group, "Mel is expecting you. If you will follow me, I show you to the conference room and get Mel for you."

She led the men to a conference room and left to get Mel. She returned a few minutes later bearing a tray of coffee cups and two flasks of coffee. As the men helped themselves to the coffee, a distinguished, white haired man joined them in the conference room.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I'm Mel Brooks, no relation to the actor. I understand that you need some legal work done."

"Yes Mr. Brooks," Clarence responded, "We do."

"Please call me Mel," Mel responded. "John filled me in on your needs last night. I have an inactive non-profit corporation already formed that you can use. All you gentlemen have to do is sign these name change documents and you will be the proud owners of a non-profit corporation. I'll take care of the necessary paperwork to set up your Homeowners Association if you'd be willing to give me a limited Power of Attorney. Do you have any questions?"

"Whoa," Ron replied, "We surely didn't expect this. Let's talk about this."

For the next hour or so, the men discussed the corporation. It was agreed that Mel would file documents to change the par value of the stock from \$1 per share to \$100 per share. In fact, Mel said, documents would be waiting for them when they arrived home. They would have to have a shareholders meeting and pass a resolution to change the par value of the stock. When he received the document back, he would forward them to an associate of his in Denver and have his friend walk them through.

"And how much is this all going to cost us?" Clarence inquired.

"Gentlemen," Mel replied, "The Corporation will cost you \$2,000. I get \$250 per hour for my time; let's say another couple of hours for the miscellaneous paperwork. \$2,500 should handle it quite nicely."

The men signed the papers, paid the attorney and left. They stopped at a Target store and loaded up on camping equipment and some warm clothing for Damon. Next, they visited a gun shop where they purchased two cases of 7.62x51mm, two cases of 5.56x45mm and two cases of 9mm. They engaged the storeowner in a conversation and he filled them in on the Colorado gun laws. They noticed that the man had several

SKS rifles in the rack behind the counter. They then stopped by the storage locker, picked up two cases each of the flechettes and double aught buck and Damon's FAL.

An hour later found them at *The Ark*. The snow had begun to melt. They managed to find enough unburned lumber to construct a hasty floor for Damon's tent and erected the tent. While they gathered a large pile of deadwood for Damon to use for a fire, Damon put his things in the tent.

"I didn't realize when I agreed to come with you, Dad that it would entail my becoming an Eskimo," Damon laughed.

"Frankly Damon, I didn't either," Gary replied. "Make the best of it and we will be back as soon as possible. I'll call John and have him look in on you from time to time to make sure you're all right. Here's Mel's card, if you run into any problems with anyone, refer them to John or to Mel. They will take care of the problem for you. In the meantime, stay warm and be careful. Don't do anything risky.

"Oh, I almost forgot; you may have a visit from a fella about my age named John Aspen. He's my first cousin. I'm going to contact him when I get back to California and talk to him about the place. If he's interested, I'll suggest that he drive down and meet you. Show him around and be friendly, he's family."

With that, the men bade Damon goodbye and once more piled into the Pathfinder, ready to resume their trip to California...

## Chapter Twenty-two – Back in the PRK

*Two days later in Acton, CA...*

As the men pulled into town, they began to relax. Ron dropped Clarence off, and then Gary. He pulled into his driveway, shut off the engine and wearily drug his luggage into the house.

“Linda, I’m home,” he called.

“I missed you,” Linda said embracing her husband. “How was the trip?”

“Long!” Ron answered flopping into his easy chair. For the next hour, he filled Linda in on the events of the last two weeks. She then told him about the new wives club the women had formed in the men’s absence.

She explained that they had been busy and had hit every garage sale they could. They had amassed several cases of mason jars for canning, had found a couple of used, but serviceable pressure canners and had practically cleaned out a dealer in Lancaster who was advertising wood stoves.

The dealer, it seems, had inadvertently underpriced the stoves by over \$150. They had gone, as a group, to his store and when he tried to back out of the advertised price they insisted that he honor his ad. It would have been different, Linda said, if the guy had just had the forethought to post a sign announcing the error in his ad, but he hadn’t and they pressed until they had forced him to cave in.

Ron wanted to know why they thought they could get away with such a thing. Linda informed him that Sharon had bought a White portable sewing machine a few months back under similar circumstances. The sales person at the store had told Sharon that they would have to honor the ad price because they hadn’t caught the error or posted a notice disclaiming the printing error.

Similar conversations occurred at the Olsen residence and at the Rawlings residence.

Wednesday morning, Acton, CA, the Olsen residence...

Ring...Ring...Ring

Without thinking, Gary picked up the phone. “Hello?” Gary said.

“Hey partner,” Ron boomed, “We best get busy and get our homes listed today.”

“Good morning to you too, Ron,” Gary laughed, “Who did you have in mind?”

Ron laughed out loud, “Partner, I called Coldwell Banker this morning to find out if Kathy

had gotten her check. I was told that she was in Cancun and wasn't expected back for a couple of weeks. What's say we use Coldwell Banker? At least SHE won't get a share of the fee for listing the homes!"

"Ok, I'll go for that," Gary replied. "I noticed Chris's car this morning, maybe he's home. If he is, I'll suggest that Patti and he go with us."

"And, I'll call Clarence," Ron suggested, "Maybe Fred has the day off too. It would be nice if we could all get our homes listed today!"

As luck would have it, Fred was off that day and the friends met at the realtor's office. The owner, a fellow named Hartwig, ushered them into the conference room as a group. They explained that they were all moving to Colorado very soon and wished to list their homes. Hartwig, for his part, was relieved that he only had to explain the process one time, rather than 5 times, and in short order, all of the paperwork was completed.

Each couple had listed their home for just over market value at Hartwig's suggestion. He went on to tell them that he thought that he could get an appraiser to value their homes by, 'the first of the week, give or take'. When they had finished, Ron suggested that they assemble at his and Linda's home for a 'brief' meeting.

As the ladies hastily assembled a lunch, the men sat around Ron's dining room table. They had just signed the papers Mel had forwarded when the ladies entered from the kitchen bearing sandwiches, potato salad and an assortment of relishes. They chatted as they ate and when they were done, the ladies cleared the table. A few minutes later, the ladies rejoined their husbands and the meeting came to order.

"Ladies! And gentlemen and I use the term loosely," Ron began to a chorus of groans, "We have a lot to do and not much time to do it in. I suggest that Clarence fill Fred and Jan in on our trip and Gary, why don't you do the same for Chris and Patti. After we finish, I suggest that we head to Melissa's and pick up our firearms.

"Linda tells me that you ladies stole 5 wood burning stoves and have quite a few fruit jars. I can only assume that in our absence, you hit the used bookstores, too. I suggest that Gary get on the phone to his cousin and see about getting us a farmer for our group. The price we paid for ammunition at that store in Pueblo was very reasonable; I took that guys card, and I'm going to call him and see if I can work out something with him regarding ammo and the SKS rifles."

Ron took a deep breath and continued. "Clarence, since you're the one who noticed that food mill of Herb's could you go online and see if you can find a similar model?"

"Sure Ron, no problem," Clarence replied.

"And while you're online, see what you can learn about the white pails of grain and such. And since I have you on the line, Clarence, will you and Fred get together and talk



to Udell?"

"No problem Ron, consider it all done," Clarence replied.

"What's that all about?" Fred asked.

"I'll fill you in later, Fred," Clarence advised.

"Chris, Linda and I have some discretionary funds," Ron continued, giving his wife a pleading look, "How about you try to buy a couple of 5-ton diesel trucks? With Linda's permission, we'll pay for them and we will sort it all out later."

"Ok," Chris replied, "I can do that, but I have a question."

"Shoot," Ron came back.

"Whose name do we buy the trucks in?" Chris asked.

"In the corporation's name, Chris," Ron responded. Each of you gentlemen is an officer of the corporation, so you're free to act on behalf of the corporation."

"Hey, wait a minute," Jan said, "What about US?"

"Normally Jan," Gary offered, a small corporation only has 4 officers, a President, Vice-President, Secretary and a Treasurer. We added one officer position, Executive Vice-President, to ensure that each family is an officer of the corporation. As it happens Jan, Fred is our Secretary. In my opinion, that makes YOU as much the Secretary of the Corporation as it does Fred. I've come to view each couple as a team; I know that without Sharon's guidance, I would have so many stubbed toes that I couldn't walk. However Jan, if it would make you feel better, Fred can resign as Secretary and we can make you the Secretary."

"That's alright," Jan, said, hugging Fred's arm and smiling, "I just didn't want you MEN getting too full of yourselves."

"If you will permit me to continue," Ron went on looking around the assembly for any sign of objection, "Gary, I'd like you to join me tomorrow afternoon at the range so we can see if these flechettes are all they are supposed to be. And, would you go to Radio shack and pick up the radios we discussed?"

"Sure Ron, will do," Gary replied.

"Fred," Ron resumed, "Where do we stand on the medical end of things?"

"Ron," Fred stated, "Say the word and I'll get with the doctor tomorrow. I have everyone's list of prescription drugs. Two things, Ron, first, I suggest that we get a two year

supply of all of the prescription drugs; and second, Jan and I don't quite have enough money put away to cover the cost of all of the drugs."

"Linda?" Ron said to his wife. She just nodded her head.

"You and Jan get with Linda and me after the meeting Fred and we will work something out." Ron replied.

"Hmm..." Ron said, "I know I'm forgetting a bunch of important things, help me out here fellas, ladies."

"Ron, we need to talk about Herb and June," Clarence reminded his friend, "And there's the family thing we discussed, too. I expect that you can start there and I'd imagine that you would remember everything once we start to talk. You really should write these things down my friend. Or at least, mention them to Gary. He's a great little organizer. It's like I was telling Gary back in Charles City. The two of you need to work together. You're a great thinker and he's a great organizer."

"Thanks for the suggestion Clarence," Ron said digging his elbow into his 'partner's' ribs. "Ok folks. While we were in Huxley, we met Derek's neighbor's Herb and June Johnson. As it turned out, Herb is quite the survivalist and is probably better prepared than we are; on top of that, as we later learned, the guy's an electrician.

"He's not only an electrician, but worked as a lineman for a utility company for a number of years. His wife June is a 6<sup>th</sup> grade school teacher. One more thing, when Herb was in the Navy, he was a SEAL. They have two boys, a 9<sup>th</sup> grader and an 11<sup>th</sup> grader. Herb sold Derek a lot of reloading equipment and is teaching him to use it. Anyway, Herb asked if they could join our community in about 6 months. Opinions?"

"I like that guy," Clarence offered, "You know he held back a bit about his being an electrician and all, but I can understand that. 'Sides, Derek's known the guy for years. I didn't say anything, but I got Derek aside and asked him how long he'd known Herb. It seems that Derek's known the guy, more or less, ever since he and June moved in across the street. They even go to the same church. Derek admitted to me that he should have known the guy was an electrician, but the subject had just never come up."

"Uncle Clarence," Fred said, "If you say he is ok, he is ok with me. Jan, what do you think?"

"I trust Clarence," Jan responded, "Fine by me."

"Chris? Patti?" Ron inquired.

"Hey, those SEAL guys are neat!" Chris replied, "He doesn't happen to drive race cars or anything does he?"

“Chris, you’re such a DORK sometimes,” Patti said. “It’s fine with US.”

“Linda?” Ron asked.

“Whatever you say Ron,” she replied.

“Sharon?” Ron inquired.

“You’re asking an Iowa native whether or not to let an Iowa family in?” Sharon chuckled.

“I’ll take that as a yes,” Ron said. “Gary I have the impression that you are all for letting them in, correct me if I’m wrong. Otherwise, why don’t you call Herb when you get home? And Gary, emphasize the trouble brewing in Saudi Arabia. And, while you talking to Herb, find out how much he knows about wind turbines!”

“No problem Ron. I’ll call him and my cousin when I get home,” Gary replied.

“Clarence, what else am I forgetting?”

“The family thing, Ron,” Clarence replied.

“Clarence, I really wasn’t part of that discussion that you and Gary had in Charles City,” Ron replied.

“No you weren’t Ron, but remember the discussion you and I had about bringing in the families?” Clarence reminded his friend. “You know, it was right around the time that we bought Derek the FAL and the Mini-14.”

“Oh, I remember,” Ron said. “Right! Clarence and I had a conversation and talked about bringing the members of our immediate families into the group. Gary basically agreed with us and Damon is camped out on the property at the moment as a result of that conversation.

“Anyway, the basic idea was that each of us could screen members of our immediate family and if we thought they had something to offer the group, somehow, with everything happening the way it did back in Iowa, I guess we sort of implemented the plan without consulting all of you.”

“That’s right Ron,” Clarence said, “Now you’ve got it. Anyway folks, Lucy and I talked it over and we sort of adopted Gary’s sons when Ron, Gary and I were back in Iowa. That’s how come things happened the way that they did.”

The couples discussed the topic for some time, eventually warming to the idea. With that agreement in place, it looked like the group was set to go.

## Chapter Twenty-three – The Farmer

*Later in the evening at Gary and Sharon's home...*

"Hello?" a male voice answered the phone.

"Herb? Gary Olsen," Gary said.

"Hi Gary, I guess you folks made it back to California in one piece?" Herb inquired.

"Without a hitch," Gary replied.

"Look Herb," Gary began, "We had a meeting earlier today and I'm calling you to advise that the group voted your family in."

"Great," Herb replied. "Did you have any trouble getting those flechettes past the border guards?"

"Herb, we took a handful of your stuff and a handful of the factory stuff and left the rest in Colorado," Gary replied, "No sense in inviting trouble. We also got one hell of a deal on double aught on our way back."

"Oh?" Herb responded, "What did you have to give for it?"

"\$150 a case for 2¾" 12 pellet double aught buck," Gary replied, "Is that a good deal?"

"Not great, but not bad," Herb replied evenly, "Of course, you have new hulls so you'll have plenty of material for reloads. How much did you buy?"

"Twenty eight cases," Gary replied. "That gives us 1,000 rounds per shotgun."

"More like a lifetime supply," Herb laughed.

"Huh?" Gary responded rather ungracefully.

"Gary, a shotgun is a close up weapon." Herb explained, "If you get into a firefight and have to resort to shotguns, you aren't going to get a lot of rounds off. Besides, it takes time to reload the shotgun, time you may not have."

"Oh!" Gary said, "Anyway, Herb, what's the soonest that you and June and the kids could be in Colorado?" Gary asked.

"You've been reading the papers, too, I see," Herb responded.

"Yep! That thing in Mecca is going to blow up in everyone's face." Gary offered.

"I agree," Herb, said, "It doesn't really matter who is behind it, the Jews are going to be blamed. Anyway, to answer your question, I've given it some thought and there's nothing in my contract with the DMPD that would prevent me from sub-contracting out the work. Unless it's a real emergency, I expect we could be there right after schools out, otherwise sooner."

"June would be good," Gary replied. "Herb, do you know much about wind turbines?"

"I've been to a school offered by Atlantic Orient," Herb explained, "IPS has been looking into wind turbines for some time now."

"Don't know as I've ever heard of them," Gary responded.

"Well, they have a unit they call the AOC 15/50," Herb continued, "It generates 50kw of energy. If I remember correctly, you get a full 50kw at about 36mph wind speed. Why do you ask?"

"Well, we were thinking of installing a couple of 50kw wind turbines backed up by a diesel generator," Gary replied.

"OH REALLY!" Herb said, "I don't believe that you fellas mentioned THAT the night we visited."

"We may not have," Gary admitted, "There was so much going on that evening."

"I'll tell you what," Herb suggested, "If you decide to go with the AOC 15/50 units, I can get away for a couple of weeks at a time to help with the installation. Just give me a call."

"Ok Herb, we surely will," Gary replied, delighted. "So far, so good" he thought to himself.

"Hello?" a male voice answered.

"Hello, is this John Aspen?" Gary asked.

"Uh yeah...who is this?" John replied.

"John, this is your cousin, Gary Olsen," Gary announced.

"GARY, YOU OLD PECKERWOOD! HELL, I AIN'T TALKED TO IN OVER 40 YEARS," John excitedly replied. "Maureen has mentioned you from time to time, but, I'll tell ya, I never expected to hear from you. You're out in California aren't you?"

"At the moment John, yes," Gary replied. "Some friends of mine and I just bought a farm in southern Colorado."

“JEEZUS, Gary,” John retorted, “Ain’t you a bit long in the tooth to take up farming?”

“I am,” Gary replied, “And I really don’t know all that much about farming either, John.”

“Then why in the blue blazes...” John responded.

“John,” Gary cut him off, “We bought the place to build, well, sort of a retirement community.”

“Bull!” John stated, “I’ll bet you’re all wrapped up with a bunch of survivalist nuts and this is going to be your retreat. Maureen has kept me well informed, Gary. Like the fact that you were in Charles City last week hiding out at that new motel they built on south Grand Avenue.”

“I know I should have called her and Darwin, John, but I was just dead tired.” Gary replied evenly trying to cement the bond they’d had over 40 years before. “Anyway John, are you still farming?”

“Naw, I retired last year.” John replied. “I understand from Maureen that you’re pretty stove up.”

“Yes, I am. Anyway John,” Gary continued, “I called to ask a rather large favor. Do you suppose you could drive down and check out our farm? My oldest son, Damon is camped out at the farm trying to clear up the refuse.”

“Camped out?” John retorted, “JEEZUS, Gary, don’t you have any better sense than to have your boy camp out in Colorado in the middle of winter?”

“Of course,” Gary replied.

“You know, I was real sorry to hear about Roger,” John said, “Then your maw dying just 6 months after. And then 2 years ago you lost your dad and step-maw one right after the other. You know’d my maw died last year didn’t you?”

“Yes, John, Maureen sent me an email. I’m sorry that I couldn’t make it back for her funeral.”

“Hells bells Gary,” John was warming, “Tain’t no big thing, I didn’t make it back for any of the funerals in your family. Anyways, what do you want me to do, Gary?”

“John if you can make your way down to Pueblo, look up a realtor by the name of John Jacobs.” Gary continued, “He will get you out to the farm. Check it out really good for us and let me know what you think. I told my son that you might or might not show up.”

“Well hell, Gary, sure, I’ll do it for ya for old time’s sake,” John said.

“Ok John thanks, my number is...” Gary started to say.

“Hell I got your phone number,” John replied sheepishly, “I waz just waitin’ to see who broke the ice first.” John laughed and hung up.

Gary started to laugh as he hung up the phone. “That so and so hasn’t changed one bit in 40 years,” he thought.

Gary dialed another number.

“Hello?” a male voice answered.

“Hi Derek,” Gary greeted his son.

“Dad!” Derek cheerfully replied. “Then you made it back ok. I was starting to worry. How does Damon like it there in California?”

“I don’t know,” Gary laughed.

“Dad!” his son chided him.

“Damon never made it to California, Derek,” Gary responded. “We left him camped out in the middle of a field in Colorado.”

“What the...” Derek began.

“He’s watching the farm for us,” Gary explained. “We got him a tent, a cot, the whole nine yards.”

“Dad! It’s cold in Colorado in the winter!” Derek announced.

“I know son, but, what with all that business in Mecca,” Gary added, “We decided to move up the time table. We have our homes on the market and plan to be in Colorado in about 6 weeks.”

“Alright!” Derek exclaimed. “You know Dad, I don’t like this business one bit. I wish I weren’t in the Guard. I hope if that mess blows up, it happens before I get sent overseas.”

“Me, too Derek, me, too,” his dad replied. “Anyway, are you about set to go?”

“I’ve got everything ready, Dad,” Derek replied, “But, as far as being set, I’ll have to admit that I’m not looking forward to being in Europe with all that is going on.”

“I talked to Herb tonight,” Gary stated.

“Really?” Derek responded, “What about?”

“Several things,” Gary allowed. “We talked about when he and his family could join us, wind turbines, the ammo we bought from Jack.”

“He liked my new guns, Dad,” Derek replied, “But I didn’t mention the double aught we bought. He said he’d help Mary with the BOB’s next week.”

“That’s good Derek,” Gary replied. “You take care of yourself. I love you son.”

“I love you too, Dad,” Derek said and hung up.

Gary replaced the phone on the cradle. “Some peace dividend,” he thought, “It’s gonna get someone hurt real bad.” (Peace dividend, coined by Bush Sr. and Thatcher)

“Ron, Gary,” Gary spoke into the phone. “I talked to Herb. It seems that he’s a bit of an ‘expert’ on wind turbines. He’s willing to come to Colorado and help us install our turbines, provided that we buy the brand he’s trained on. And, he thinks that maybe he and his family can move to Colorado as soon as school’s out.”

“Hello to you, too partner,” Ron laughed.

“Sorry,” Gary responded, “And, I talked to my cousin John. I had to put up with a little cussing, but he’s agreed to ‘check out’ the farm for us. So, the hook is baited and in the water. And, I talked to Derek. Let me tell you, he is not looking forward to being away from his family right now.”

“Gary,” Ron offered, “Linda and I talked it over. We are going to make the same offer to Jennifer, Brenda and Kevin that I made to Paula.”

“Do you think they’ll come?” Gary asked.

“Brenda and Jennifer and their families might.” Ron replied, “But Kevin knows it all, so I doubt he’ll come. Even if the girls don’t come right away, I’d expect them to show up if the SHTF. Hell, partner, they live less than a day’s drive away.

“Linda is going to organize the women, with Sharon’s help, and lay in as many canning supplies as possible. And, my assumption was wrong; they haven’t been to the used bookstores yet. She said that they would take care of that immediately. God, Gary, so much to do and so little time. Ciao, partner,” Ron said and hung up the phone.



## Chapter Twenty-four – Farm Equipment

*The next morning, 7:45 am, Gary and Sharon's home...*

Ring...Ring...Ri

A few moments later, Sharon nudged her husband, "Gary, phone!"

"Uh...huh...who is it?" he struggled to awaken.

"Ron," she replied giving Gary a bit of an evil eye.

Gary struggled out of bed and made it to his office located in the next room. He flopped in his chair and picked up the phone only to get a dial tone. He squinted at the phone, punched the button for line 1 and mumbled, "Hello?"

"Good morning partner, how are you this fine day?" Ron cheerfully greeted him.

"Dang Ron!" Gary half shouted, "It's the middle of the night! What time is it anyway?"

"7:45," Ron announced, "The day is half gone already."

"Yeah, right! I've never known you to get up before 9 am, Ron, what's up?" Gary asked.

"Before we went back to Iowa, I asked you to check on tractors, remember?" Ron inquired.

"Yes, and I did, why?" Gary retorted.

"You never told us what you found out," Ron spoke softly.

"Ron, there's a dealer in Lancaster," Gary replied, "He carries Ford, Case and some import brand I never heard of."

"Did he have any good used equipment?" Ron continued.

"He had a lot of used equipment, Ron," Gary replied, "How good it is, I have no idea."

"What were the prices like?" Ron asked.

"I dang near had a heart attack right on the spot!" Gary answered. "Dad was a Ford dealer. I remember back in '67 he got about \$8,000, give or take, for the big diesel Ford had brought out. My God, Ron, the USED tractors were several times that price!"

"Gary, how much did a home cost back in '67?" Ron inquired.

“Well you could buy a decent home for \$20,000...Oh, I see your point,” Gary replied.

“Gary, why don’t you get cleaned up, grab a bite and I’ll pick you up around 9?” Ron suggested.

“Ok, if I can wake up by then. See you at 9,” Gary mumbled, hanging up the phone.

Sharon slid a cup of coffee in front of her husband. Gary just sat there thinking, “My God, this is starting to get expensive. We should have started doing this 20 years ago.”

Gary got a quick shower, said hell with shaving, dressed and forced down a couple of slices of toast. Just as he was finishing, the doorbell rang.

“You ready?” Ron asked, standing at the door.

“Come on in and give me a minute,” Gary replied, “I’ll get my coat.”

After grabbing his coat, pausing, and returning to the office for his cigarettes, Gary joined Ron and they headed for the car.

“Morning Gary!” Clarence greeted his friend.

“Clarence, did Ron call you in the middle of the night, too?” Gary inquired.

“Gary, I’ve been getting up at 5 am for as long as I can remember,” Clarence chuckled, “It gets hot in the afternoon here in the desert and we tend to get an early start and knock off early.”

Ron directed the Pathfinder toward Lancaster and Gary and Clarence continued to visit. Gary filled Clarence in on the phone calls he’d made the previous night and what he’d learned.

“I was busy, too Gary,” Clarence offered. “Went out on the Internet and found a place called Walton Feeds in Montpelier, Idaho. Then, there is Emergency Essentials in Orem Utah. I’m pretty sure that’s where Herb got his food. Anyway, they have anything we’d ever want in food. They also have something called a County Living Grain Mill. It looked just like the model Herb had.”

“Clarence did you and Fred have a chance to visit with Udell?” Ron inquired.

“No Ron; but we’re going to take care of that tonight,” Clarence responded.

“Gary, have you talked to Lorrie and David?” Ron continued.

“Sharon is going to go visit with Lorrie this morning,” Gary replied.

The men arrived at the implement dealer and got out of the car. They walked the lot looking at the equipment, new and used. Gary paused at an old Ford tractor that had a backhoe mounted on it.

“Geez,” I haven’t seen one of those in years,” he commented.

“What is it?” Ron asked.

“Ron,” Gary announced, “That’s a NAA Ford tractor. And, from the looks of it, I’d bet that whoever owned it bought it with the backhoe.”

“Why do you say that?” Ron asked.

“I don’t know how to answer your question,” Gary responded. “Darwin’s dad had a rig just like this. He dug many a hole with it. It’s just the setup, I really don’t know how to explain it.”

“Is it diesel?” Ron asked.

“Nope, gasoline,” Gary responded wistfully.

“Can I help you gents?” a man asked, ‘I’m Ralph Williams.”

“Ralph,” Gary replied, “We are just window shopping. Boy that old NAA with the backhoe brings back memories. I’m Gary Olsen and this gentleman here is Ron Green and the other fellow is Clarence Rawlings.”

“Nice to meet you all,” Ralph replied, “Are you in the market for some farm equipment?”

“Yes and no,” Ron responded, “We threw in together and bought a farm in Colorado. We just wanted to get some ideas about what we might need for equipment.”

“Colorado?” Ralph replied, “Could I ask where in Colorado?”

“Pueblo area,” Gary replied.

“Pueblo?” Ralph reflected.

“Yes, why?” Ron asked.

“Well gentlemen,” Ralph explained, “Considering the weight and distance, it wouldn’t make much sense for you to buy equipment here and haul it all of the way to Colorado. Besides, I couldn’t warranty equipment located that far away. Have you been to Pueblo recently?”

“Just got back from there,” Ron replied, “Why?”

“You didn’t happen to notice a large implement business just outside of town did you?”

“Now that you mention it,” Clarence said, “I did notice that business, but only in passing. Gary keeps the foot down, you know.”

“My wife’s brother is the sales manager at that business,” Ralph announced. “And, I’m sure that they would have whatever you need. Why don’t you step into the showroom and I’ll get you his number and address.”

The men entered the showroom and waited while Ralph went to his office, jotted a number on a pad and returned. “Here you go,” he said, “Can I give you gentlemen a piece of advice?”

“Sure,” they responded.

“Gentlemen, spring is just around the corner,” Ralph commented. “I wouldn’t wait too long to make your purchases. Come spring, the demand will increase and while the prices won’t change, dealers are less flexible. You would do well to buy while there is still snow on the ground.”

The men thanked Ralph, got in the Pathfinder and returned to Acton.

“Talk about dumb luck,” Ron muttered.

“I know what you mean Ron,” Clarence said recalling their conversation in Pueblo.

Ron drove them straight to his home. “Come on in fellas,” he said, “We need to parlay.”

“Morning fellas,” Linda said giving Ron a mean look for bringing guests in unannounced, “Care for some coffee?”

“Sure,” the three men said.

They sat down at the table and Linda brought their coffee.

“Lyn, join us for a moment,” Ron plead.

Linda returned to the kitchen, got her cup of coffee and returned to the dining room and sat down.

“What’s up honey?” she asked.

“Lyn, do you suppose that you and the girls could put together a list of what we would need for food for one year for say 35 people?”

“Well, I suppose,” Linda, replied hesitantly. “How did it go in Lancaster?”

“Farm equipment is very expensive,” Ron, replied, “We may need to re-think that proposition.”

“Linda,” Gary responded, “The same tractor that my father sold new for \$8,000 is selling for many times that amount, used.”

“I think fellas that we need to return to Colorado!” Ron stated.

“Honey, what do you want me to do with the food list once we get it together?” Linda asked.

“Lyn, go online and find Walton Feed.” Ron replied, “Use your best judgment and order the food. Have it drop shipped to the farm in Colorado. And, while you’re at it, get a Country Living grain mill and a Berkey water filter.”

‘Ok hon,’ Linda replied somewhat resigned to the idea of living in poverty.

“Fellas, let’s get our weapons and go to the range.” Ron suggested, “We need to sight them in.”

Ron gathered his new weapons and they drove to Clarence’s to pick up his. Next, they stopped by Gary’s house and picked up his. They drove to the range and began to test fire their new weapons.

In a little over an hour, they had everything sighted in and Ron suggested that they test fire the flechette ammo. He set up a silhouette and they switched the barrels on the shotguns from the 28” barrels to the 20” barrels. Ron divided the two-dozen shells among them and they took turns shooting at the silhouette.

“I sure don’t think much of this stuff,” Clarence exclaimed. “And we have 3,000 rounds of it.

“Hmm, Clarence, I have an idea,” Gary announced.

“And what might that be?” Clarence asked.

“Well, I’d rather not say at the moment,” Gary replied.

“Why don’t the two of you go back to Colorado and take care of things there?” he continued, “I have to make a trip to San Jose.”